

Historical Archive Profile: Jeff D'Agostino

Organization: American Wild Turkey Historical Foundation

Collection: Contemporary Masters & Legacy Callmakers

Business: The Art of The Call

I. Biographical Overview

Jeff D'Agostino is a National Champion callmaker, wildlife artist, and conservationist whose work bridges the gap between traditional primitive instruments and fine decorative art. A native of West Virginia and a former WVU baseball player, Jeff's professional life as a Health Care Administrator provided the discipline that he now applies to the "tuning phase" of every yelper he creates. Since retiring in 2021, he has dedicated his second career to **The Art of The Call**, operating out of Simpsonville, South Carolina.

II. Evolution of Craft & Style

Jeff's journey into callmaking began in the early 1980s as an extension of his passion for the spring woods.

- **The Early Era (1990–2021):** Jeff began crafting wingbone calls circa 1990. While family and career remained his primary focus during these decades, his early talent was validated by a 1st Place win in the 1997 NWTF Grand National Custom Callmaking Competition.
- **The Artistic Shift (2022–Present):** Following his retirement, Jeff's work underwent a transformation. He shifted from traditional scrimshaw to a sophisticated technique involving pencil, ink, and infused color. This allowed for highly detailed wildlife scenes that turned functional tools into "heirloom-quality" canvases.
- **Materiality & Mastery:** His archive includes mastery over diverse natural materials, specifically:
 - **Wingbones:** Wild turkey humerus, radius and ulna bones.
 - **Yelpers:** River Cane, Jordan-style, and hybrids utilizing bone, antler, and cow horn.

III. Philosophy: "The Art of The Call"

The foundation of Jeff's work is the belief that a hunter's tools should be as timeless as the tradition itself. His process is defined by two distinct pillars:

1. **Laser-Focused Voice:** Each call is tuned to a "proven in the field" turkey resonance, ensuring the instrument's utility is never sacrificed for its beauty.
2. **Historical Documentation:** Every custom piece is signed, numbered, and accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity and a handwritten letter detailing the call's voice and the origin of its materials.

IV. Notable Honors & Awards

Jeff's contributions to the historical record of callmaking are marked by consistent excellence in the **NWTF Grand National Custom Callmaking Competitions** across four decades:

- **2026 South Carolina Callmaker of the Year** (Marion Burnside Central Carolina Chapter)
- **Multi-Year National Champion:** 1st Place & Best in Class (Decorative Division) in 1997, 2024, 2025, and 2026.
- **Legacy Selection:** In 2026, Jeff was selected for the NWTF Legacy Callmakers Collection, cementing his place in the modern history of the craft.

V. Personal Legacy

A dedicated family man and naturalist, Jeff views his work as a way of "transforming natural raw elements into functional works of art." His archive serves as a testament to the hunter-artist who finds as much joy in the success of others using his calls as he does in the creation of the piece itself.

Technical Addendum: Materials and Methodology

Craftsman: Jeff D'Agostino

Specialization: Osteological and Botanical Yelpers

I. Material Sourcing and Preparation (Osteology)

The foundation of the D'Agostino yelper is the wild turkey wingbone, the **radius, ulna, and humerus**.

- **Cleaning & Degreasing:** To ensure archival stability, bones undergo a rigorous multi-stage cleaning process. This involves the removal of all organic marrow and connective tissue, followed by a controlled degreasing phase to prevent future discoloration or structural degradation.
- **Sun-Bleaching:** Bones are naturally sun-bleached to achieve a clean, neutral white canvas.
- **Acoustic Assembly:** The bones are fitted together using traditional methods. The joints are sealed to be airtight, ensuring that the suction-style "yelp" is consistent and resonant.

II. Botanical and Composite Elements

In addition to bone, D'Agostino utilizes a variety of natural substrates to expand the tonal range and aesthetic profile of his instruments:

- **River Cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*):** Harvested and cured to provide a mellow, woody resonance often associated with early 20th-century callmaking.
- **Bovine Horn and Antler:** Used primarily for ferrules, mouthpieces, and bells. These materials are selected for their density, which provides a sharp, clear "cut" to the call's voice.

III. Illustrative Techniques: The Transition from Scrimshaw

A defining characteristic of D'Agostino's late-period work (2022–Present) is the shift from traditional scrimshaw to a **multimedia infusion process**.

1. **Surface Preparation:** The bone surface is polished to a high-grit finish to close the pores and create a smooth field for fine-line work.
2. **Pencil and Ink Rendering:** Using archival-quality ink and graphite, intricate wildlife scenes are hand-drawn directly onto the bone. This allows for a level of detail—such as individual feather barbs and anatomical shadowing—that exceeds the capabilities of traditional scratching.
3. **Color Infusion:** Pigments are strategically infused into the design to provide realistic tonality. This method ensures the color remains vibrant and does not sit "on top" of the bone but becomes part of the material itself.

4. **Sealant and Preservation:** Each call is finished with a protective coating that shields the artwork from the oils of the hand and environmental moisture, ensuring the piece remains field-ready while preserving its museum-quality appearance.

IV. Tuning and Calibration

The most critical phase is the **Acoustic Calibration**. Every call is hand-tuned to ensure a full "turkey vocabulary," including the yelp, cluck, and purr. D'Agostino treats the tuning phase with clinical precision, adjusting the length and diameter of the air channel to yield the specific frequency and "break" required for professional field use.

Legacy Statement: Jeff D'Agostino

My contribution to the history of American wild turkey hunting is rooted in the preservation of the **functional artifact**. I wish to be remembered as a craftsman who honored the primitive origins of the wingbone and yelper while elevating their aesthetic potential to the level of fine wildlife art. My work is intended to serve as a bridge between the deep-rooted traditions of the past and the evolving standards of contemporary craftsmanship.

Ultimately, I hope my legacy is found in the endurance of these instruments—not merely as silent pieces in a collection, but as vibrant, "living" tools that continue to echo the voice of the wild turkey. I strive for my work to be recognized as a testament to the belief that the tools of the woodsman should be as timeless, soulful, and enduring as the wilderness they represent.