

TURKEY

Phylum: Chordata; Class: Aves; Order: Galliformes; Family: Phasianidae
Meleagris gallopavo

Weight: 20-25 pounds on average

Habitat: forests interspersed with open areas

Range: The turkey has been introduced in several areas outside the limits of its original range.

North America: California, Oregon, Washington, Plains states, Rocky mountain states, southeast U.S., eastern states; portions of Mexico; small areas of Canada.

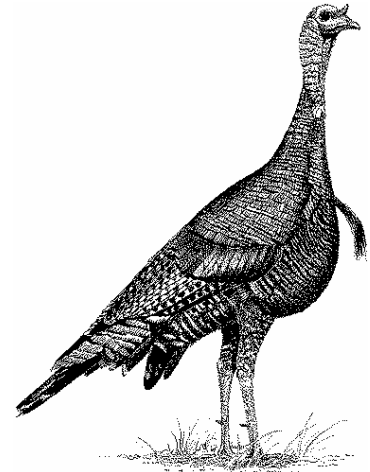
Status:

- By 1890-1900 wild turkeys were nearly extinct in the United States.
- Turkeys have been restocked in much of their former range and introduced in other areas.
- Today there are more than 4 million wild turkeys in the United States.

Diet in the wild: forage for nuts, seeds, acorns, insects

Special features:

- Mature male turkeys are often referred to as “**gobblers**” because of their characteristic “gobble” vocalization. Gobblers less than one year of age are called “**jakes**”. Female turkeys are known as “**hens**”.
- Both females and males have a fleshy appendage of skin above the beak, called the **snood**. Both sexes also have a “thin flap of skin along the underside of the neck called the **wattle**” (Hlavachick 6-7).
- Gobblers have prominent **caruncles**, ‘globs’ of red flesh, along the base of their neck.
- Gobblers, and occasionally hens, have hair-like feathers at the top of the breast called a **beard**. The “beard” may be 8-12 inches long on mature gobblers.
- Males also have “**spurs**” on the backs of their legs which are used in fights for dominance and to defend against predators.
- Wild turkeys are somewhat smaller and more slender than their domesticated counterparts.
- Females and immature birds have duller colors and are smaller than the males.
- Turkeys “are efficient fliers and can reach speeds of 50 mph” (Hlavachick 7).
- **Predators** of wild turkeys include humans, coyotes, skunks, raccoons, opossums, bobcats, foxes, weasels, mink, squirrels, chipmunks, hawks, and various snake species.



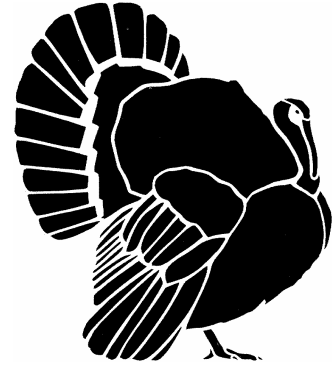
Social organization & Behavior:

- Wild turkeys roost in trees at night.
- Male turkeys often have 10 or more females in their “harems”.



Breeding & Care of Young:

- Wild turkeys are **polygamous**. A dominant male will breed with several hens.
- The mating season runs from February through April. In Kansas, the breeding season typically begins in mid-March.
- Males have rather elaborate **courtship rituals**. During the breeding season, a male struts, puffs up his body feathers, fans his large tail feathers, and drags the tips of his primary wing feather tips as he walks in a tight 'S' pattern. The male's coloration becomes more vivid: the snood and caruncles turn bright red and the forehead turns white or light turquoise.
- Males also use their characteristic "**gobbling**" call more frequently during the breeding season.
- Males are often so consumed by performing their mating rituals that they forego eating. "The breast sponge, a ball of fatty reserve located at the juncture of the neck and breast" provides them with energy (Hlavachick 8).
- Females typically lay **10-12 eggs** in a nest. Nests are shallow depressions lined with grass and leaves.
- Hens incubate the eggs. After 28 days, the eggs hatch, and the young turkeys, often called "poults", emerge.
- Turkey chicks, like all pheasant-like birds are **precocial** birds. That means that they hatch feathered and ready to follow their parents. Birds, such as parrots, which are born featherless and helpless are referred to as altricial.



References:

- Fire Effects Information System/ USDA Forest Service (FEIS). "*Meleagris gallopavo*." FEIS web site, 9/99 <www.fs.fed.us/database/feis/>.
- Hlavachick, Bill and Mike Miller. "The Wild Turkey Story". Kansas Wildlife & Parks 54(May/June 1997): 2-11.
- Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks. "On TRACKS" newsletter. 8(Winter 1996).
- "Killing with Kindness." U.S. News & World Report, 11/25/96, pg. 49.
- National Geographic. Field Guide to the Birds of North America. 3rd ed. Washington D.C.: National Geographic.

