



1200 Pioneer Circle, Watkinsville, GA 30677, www.letsgetwild.net

WILD TURKEY FACTS

- The adult male turkey is called a gobbler. A male bird less than a year old is called a jake. An adult female turkey is called a hen and a female turkey less than one year old is called a jenny. Young turkeys (male and female) less than a few months of age are called poults.
- Wild turkey populations were almost eliminated by the 1930s (less than 30,000 birds) due to habitat destruction and unregulated shooting. Today, there are over 7 million wild turkeys in the United States. In fact, there are now spring turkey seasons in 49 states (Alaska does not have any wild turkeys). Hunters annually harvest over ½ million turkeys a year; wild turkey numbers are still increasing.
- Early efforts to reestablish wild turkeys involved hatching and raising turkeys in pens and then releasing them into the wild. This technique was not successful because the pen-raised birds lacked the survival instincts necessary to survive in the wild. Wildlife biologists now capture wild birds using nets and release the captured birds into suitable areas currently unoccupied by wild turkeys.
- There are 5 subspecies of the wild turkey; Eastern, Osceola, Rio Grande, Merriam's and Gould's. The Gould's is the only subspecies not hunted in the United States. The Ocellated turkey of Central America is actually a different species.
- Insects are the young turkey's (poults) primary food item during the spring and early summer. For this reason, wildlife openings (grass fields) provide important habitat for young turkey broods because the openings provide an abundance of grasses that attract large numbers of insects (the insects feed on the grasses). Insects make up over 90% of a poult's diet during their first month of life. Insects are rich in protein and provide turkey's a high-energy food source.
- During the spring, a male (gobblers and jakes) wild turkey's physical appearance changes; his head turns a brilliant red, white, and blue color. He can often be seen puffed up, tail feathers fanned out and his wings dragging on the ground. This display is called strutting and the purpose of this display is to attract hens for breeding.
- During the winter, hard mast such as acorns, are the primary food sources for wild turkeys. Planting soft-mast bearing trees and shrubs, such as hawthorn, crabapple, and dogwood, are important additions to a turkey's winter habitat, especially during years when acorns are in short supply.
- Hens can also grow beards, but less frequently than gobblers. From 0% to 15% of a turkey population may contain bearded hens. These bearded hens can reproduce normally.
- Prescribed burning of the forest is an important habitat management technique for the wild turkey. Prescribed burning removes much of the woody shrubs, that can choke out the forest understory (plants growing at ground level) and promotes the growth of grasses and forbs. The removal of fire from our landscape has severely hurt turkey populations in many areas.
- Wild turkeys are very strong flyers and can attain speeds up to 50 mph. Although turkeys usually fly only 100 to 200 yards, they can easily fly several miles at a time.
- An adult gobbler will weigh approximately 21 pounds. An adult hen will weigh between 8 and 11 pounds.

Spring Turkey Hunting Tips

- A turkey's vision is incredible! Being able to sit still is probably the most important part of turkey hunting. Before season opens, practice sitting without moving, without blinking, holding up a shotgun in shooting position for long periods of time. It's more difficult than you think!
- Practice using a turkey call. Become proficient at calling tom turkeys within range.
- Locate a place to hunt and obtain written permission from the landowner before the season opens. Information about all public hunting lands open for turkey hunting is available from the Department of Natural Resources. Obtain and use maps of the property. A good place to find maps on the web is: <http://terraserver.homeadvisor.msn.com/default.asp>
- Scout for turkeys year-round. Just before the season opens, scout your hunting sites for signs of activity, including feathers, droppings, tracks, roost trees, and turkey sounds. Do not make any turkey calls; this will only educate the birds to your calling.
- Select a calling site with an open area for they turkey to walk into and an unrestricted view of 50 yards in all directions. When you find a likely spot, stay put. Do not attempt to stalk turkeys.
- Wear camouflage clothing to blend into the surroundings, but do not restrict vision with brush or bulky head netting. Avoid wearing black, blue, red, and white, colors that resemble those of turkeys.
- Conceal your silhouette by sitting against a tree wider than your shoulders and higher than your head. It will also provide protection from a shot fired from behind by another hunter. Or you may want to use a portable blind.
- Carry decoys in a camouflaged or hunter-orange bag so other hunters will not mistake the decoy for a live bird. Orange tape attached to the tree against which a hunter sits offers added protection.
- A decoy placed strategically in a large, open area will be visible to toms from a long distance and attract attention away from a hunter. Use jake decoys or a jake and a hen. Place your decoy where you want your turkey to be when you shoot.
- Turkeys are most effectively killed by the shocking power of a tight pattern of many small pellets aimed at the head. Never shoot at a flying turkey or at the body of a turkey. If you cannot get a head shot, do not shoot! Turkeys should be shot at 30 yards or less. Pattern your shotgun before turkey season. Learn how to judge distance. If you are unable to judge properly, learn how to pace off yards and place small markers around you at 30-yard distances.
- When carrying your bird out of the hunting area, place it completely in a game bag or attach an orange flag to it. Do not carry the bird across your back. Some other hunter may see the bird, but not you, and take a shot.