

Wild Turkey

(Meleagris gallopavo)



DID YOU KNOW:

In the early 1900s only a few thousand wild turkeys remained. Today, millions of these large birds thrive across the United States, thanks to restoration programs conducted by state and national conservation groups.

EATING HABITS:

Insects, seeds and nuts, especially acorns, are the turkey's favorite foods. Turkeys eat twice a day, when they awake in the morning and just before going to sleep at night. Throughout the fall and into winter, turkeys eat a lot to put on fat so they can survive cold weather. In severe weather a turkey could survive about two weeks without eating.

THE YOUNG:

Baby turkeys are called poults. In the spring, mom turkey (hen) lays about 12 eggs in a nest on the ground. She incubates the eggs for four weeks. Dad provides no parental care at all. After the eggs hatch, the hen and her poults leave the nest area for good. The poults are nearly full grown by fall.



HABITAT (HOME):

Turkeys thrive in wooded areas with access to open, grassy fields and water. They gain safety at night by roosting. Turkeys get moisture from morning dew in the warm months, but need a creek or pond for drinking during cold weather. They feed, nest and breed in grassy areas.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Turkeys have excellent hearing and eyesight. The poults learn from their mother to be alert and wary of predators. Turkeys can't run very fast, but they can burst out of hiding at speeds up to 35 mph for a short distance. This can really scare a predator.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Turkeys stay in groups called flocks. Adult males (toms) form flocks; hens with poults gather in separate flocks; young hens without poults form a third flock; and young males (jakes) flock together in the fall. During the winter, as many as 200 turkeys may flock together.
- Turkeys keep their flocks together by making many different sounds. They purr, cackle, hum and gobble.
- During warmer months, turkeys eat insects, salamanders, frogs, small lizards and snakes; during fall and winter, they feast on acorns and seeds.