

FACTSHEET WILD TURKEY



SPECIES PROFILE *MELEAGRIS GALLOPAVO*

- ▶ Six subspecies: Eastern, Osceola, Rio Grande, Merriam's, Gould's, and South Mexican
- ▶ Average weight is 6kg
- ▶ Average life span 2.5 years
- ▶ Diet of seeds, fruits, vegetation, insects
- ▶ State game bird for Alabama, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and South Carolina
- ▶ 1st meal on the moon was roast turkey with all the trimmings
- ▶ Very powerful legs and can run at speeds of up to 25 miles per hour; top flight speed is 55 miles per hour
- ▶ 1 of only 2 birds native to North America that has been regularly domesticated and is now raised for food all over the world

A CONSERVATION SUCCESS STORY

For many North Americans, gathering around a turkey is synonymous with tradition, family and cultural traditions. However, it carries with it a dramatic conservation success story. Prior to the arrival of Europeans to the continent, the North American wild turkeys were historically plentiful. Pre-Columbian estimates of wild turkeys in the United States were around 10 million birds. The species represented an important resource for North America's indigenous peoples who used the animals for food, clothing, tools, and ceremonial purposes. Early colonial reports frequently mention the abundance of wild turkeys. This predictably led to the species becoming a significant food source for settlers.

During this time, neither commercial nor hunting for the purpose of food were regulated. Therefore, as the population of settlers increased, so too did the demand for wild turkey meat. As a result, excessive slaughter, combined with habitat loss, soon took a terrible toll on North American wild turkey populations, sending them into a dramatic decline.

By 1920, the wild turkey had disappeared completely from nearly of half of the then 39 U.S. States. They had also been extirpated from Ontario, Canada. By 1940, across the U.S. and Canada, all populations of wild turkey were considered vulnerable as continental populations had declined by more than 90%.

The side effects of the Great Depression provided the perfect conditions to bring about the restoration of wild turkey populations. 14 million rural Americans left their homes in search of employment elsewhere leaving family farms abandoned. As these plots of land reverted back to their native grasses, shrubs and trees, make-shift, wild turkey habitats began to take shape.

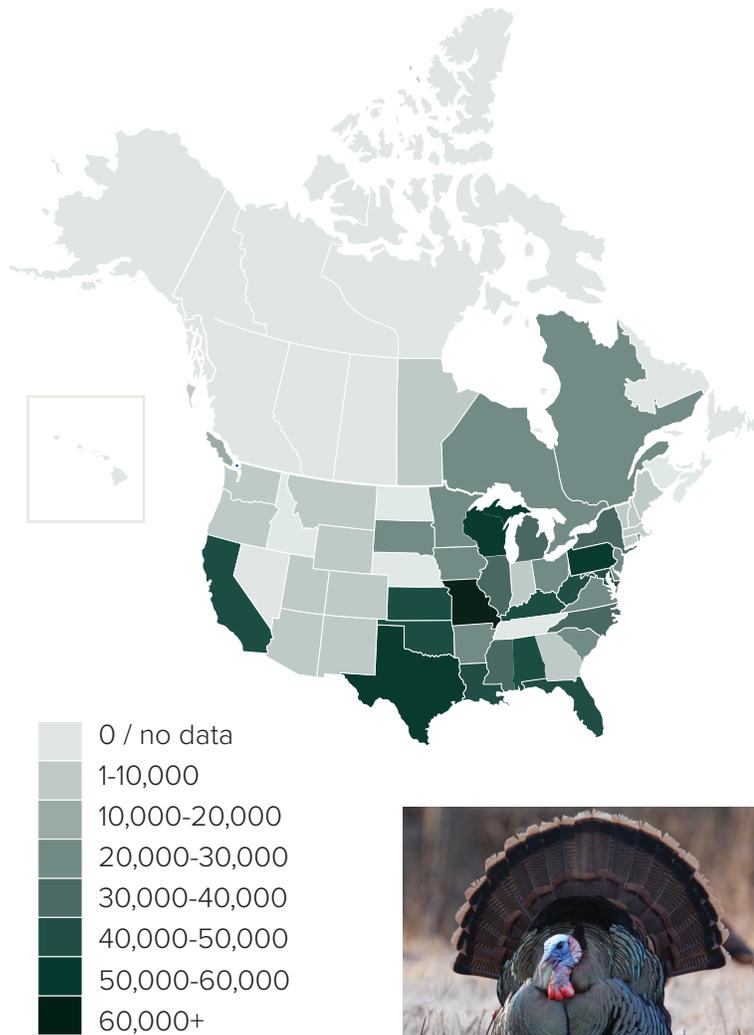
Additionally, hunting organizations pushed for early legislation that paved the way for further and effective wild turkey conservation and restoration. First attempts at restoration were frequently based on the release of pen-reared turkeys. This approach, while costly, proved ineffective. Advanced capture techniques, however, for the trap and transfer of wild turkeys to unoccupied habitats. This was the true start of the conservation and restoration of the species. With the assistance of the hunter-founded National Wild Turkey Federation in 1986, a sophisticated system of state-to-state transfer was perfected. This led to the development of an aggressive system of trap and transfer programs which, over 30 years, restored wild turkeys in both the United States and Canada. By the early 2000s, their numbers had recovered to near pre-colonial abundance. Thanks to those efforts, today there are more than 7 million combined wild turkeys in both nations.

WEIGHT OF WILD TURKEY HARVEST IN THE US AND CANADA

	Live Weight of Harvest	Consumable Weight of Harvest	Number of Meals (6oz serving)
CANADA	343,280 lbs	175,327 lbs	467,539
US	21,396,064 lbs	10,927,029 lbs	43,708,116

Please cite as: Mahoney, S.P. (2020). The Wild Harvest Initiative®: Wild Turkey [Fact sheet]. Conservation Visions, St. John's, NL, Canada.

NUMBER OF WILD TURKEY HARVESTED BY JURISDICTION



More than 1.4 million wild turkeys were harvested in the US and Canada between 2014-2016.



DID YOU KNOW...

In addition to being flavorful, wild turkey is a healthy source of protein that is low in cholesterol and harmful fats. This majestic bird spends its entire life grazing on a broad range of plants and insects, and is free of steroids, antibiotics, and other synthetic chemicals. Wild turkey is also a great source of minerals, vitamins, iron, and riboflavin.

ABOUT THE WILD HARVEST INITIATIVE®

The Wild Harvest Initiative® is the first serious effort to synthesize and evaluate the combined economic, conservation and social benefits of recreational wild animal harvests in America and Canada. The program's combined primary emphasis on food security and wildlife conservation is tailored to change conversations and provide new ways of communicating the relevance and benefits of recreational hunting and angling.