



# Turkey

**GALLIFORMES**  
**Family: Meleagrididae**  
**Genus: Meleagris**  
**Species: gallopavo**



**Range:** Eastern US from Pennsylvania to Florida south into Mexico. Remnant populations found locally in Wyoming, Illinois and New York.

**Habitat:** Forests & woodlands

**Niche:** Terrestrial, arboreal & omnivorous

**Biomes:**

**Wild diet:** Berries, nuts, seeds, buds, grasshoppers, lizards, crayfish, crabs

**Zoo diet:**

**Life Span:** (Wild) 5  
(Captivity)

**Sexual dimorphism:** Males are larger

**Location in SF Zoo:** Children's Zoo, wild turkey on Nature trail, domesticated at Children's Farm

---

## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

---

Wild Turkeys have the longest tail feathers of any native North American bird. The head and neck are bare of feathers, but ornamented with protuberances (caruncles) which are colored red and blue, becoming brighter during mating season. Large feet support medium long legs, bearing spurs. Besides being smaller than the male, the female is duller in coloration when compared to the male's metallic brown plumage. Domesticated birds lack this coloration and are instead white overall. Wild Turkeys are not as robust as the domesticated birds

**Weight:** M - 75lbs

**Length:** M - 48"  
F - 36"

---

## STATUS & CONSERVATION

---

Clearing of forests, plus hunting pressures has eliminated the wild bird completely in the New England states where Puritan settlers found them plentiful. Regulation of hunting and good game management has helped preserve them the remaining Eastern woodlands.

---

## COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

---

Observers report the “toms” alert the flock with a distinctive call when danger threatens. Wild turkeys associate in small flocks, usually one polygamous male and a half dozen or so hens. They are strong fliers, taking to the trees for night roosting but they are not migratory.

---

## COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

---

The long tail of the male is used during courtship display, being raised fan like, and the body feathers being puffed out to several times their normal appearance. Both sexes engage in noisy ‘gobbling’ and showy strutting during courtship, but after mating the hen carries on alone, leaving the group to build a nest. The nest is a leaf-lined depression on the ground. The precocial young hatch from spotted buff colored eggs.

Incubation: 28 days	Sexual Maturity:
# of Eggs: 8-15	Fledging:

---

## MISCELLANEOUS

---

- ◆ The Turkey may have been domesticated prior to 600 A.D. It was then introduced to Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Spanish explorers in Mexico.
- ◆ This endemic species can be found in the fossil record going back some 40-million years.
- ◆ Selective breeding did not occur until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today commercial poultry men raise mainly a small white turkey that is plucked more easily than larger bronze birds.
- ◆ Wild turkeys are said to have larger brains and later sexual maturity than domestic breeds.
- ◆ Various subspecies occur locally throughout western region

### Sources:

There are no sources listed for the 11/95 revision

Supplemental sources for this 3/2007 revision includes:

Audubon Society FG to North American Birds Eastern Region © 1977 page 631

The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Birds of the World © 2005 page 111

The New Larousse Encyclopedia of Animal Life © 1980 page 401