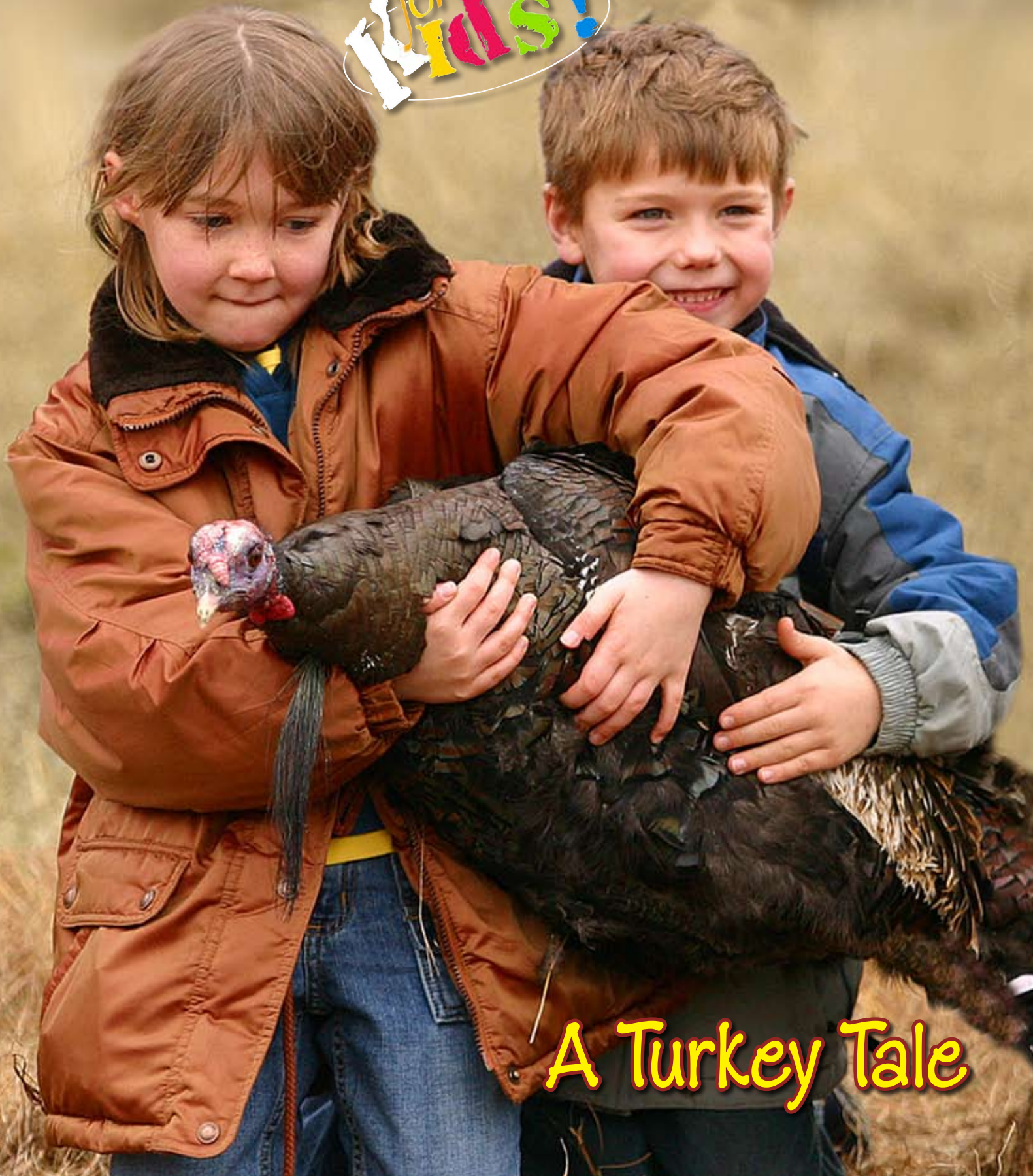


NEW YORK STATE
Conservationist

for
KIDS!



A Turkey Tale

Welcome to NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

for
Kids!

Jim Clayton

In this issue:

You can go just about anywhere in New York State today and there's a pretty good chance you'll see

WILD TURKEYS.

But that wasn't always the case. What happened to the wild turkeys? Theirs is a conservation success story and will help you understand how dedicated wildlife managers work to maintain healthy wildlife populations.

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Go to www.dec.ny.gov/public/43355.html to sign up and have it e-mailed directly to you.

Cover photo courtesy of National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf)

A

TIMELINE

1600

2000



By the late 1800s, about three quarters of New York State was cleared of forests. Around the same time, some people began leaving their farms and moving into cities. Over time, some of the farmland became overgrown with brush and, later, with trees, making it suitable habitat for wild turkeys once again. Around 1948, a small group of wild turkeys moved into western New York State from northern Pennsylvania. They were the first wild turkeys back in New York in 100 years.

Find out what happened on the next page! →

Habitat:

the key for all wildlife—the right amounts and kinds of food, water, shelter and space (the size of the animal's home range), all arranged in a way that they can use

Wild Turkey

Historic Range Limits in NY

Northern Limit



In the 1600s, wild turkeys lived across New York State, south of the Adirondacks.

By the mid-1800s, turkeys were completely gone from New York.

Today, they can be found everywhere in the state, including the high peaks of the Adirondacks and even in our largest cities.

In the 1600s, when Europeans arrived in what is now New York State, most of the land was covered by forests. Many kinds of wildlife lived in the forests, including wild turkeys. Early settlers cut down forests to make open areas for farming and to use the wood for building. The settlers did not understand how to balance needs of wildlife with their own needs. They cut a lot of forests, and important wildlife habitat was lost. There were no regulated hunting seasons in those days, and settlers hunted turkeys for food year-round. Wild turkeys sometimes wandered into barnyards, where they caught diseases and parasites from domestic turkeys kept by the settlers. This combination of habitat loss, unregulated hunting and domestic poultry diseases meant hard times for turkeys. **By the mid-1800s, wild turkeys were no longer seen in New York State.**

DID YOU KNOW
that turkeys
roost (sleep)
in trees?



Wild Turkey Habitat:

woodlands with different kinds of trees, places for roosting and good ground cover for nesting, plus a variety of foods, including plants, insects, fruits, beechnuts, acorns; also farm fields where waste grain is available



Wildlife managers help species survive by conserving their populations and habitats or, in some cases, by restoring species and their habitats that have declined or disappeared from New York. Turkeys are an important part of the forest ecosystem and food web, feeding on plants and insects, while being a food source for other wildlife. They are also an important part of our state's heritage and are a species that people like to hunt.

Restoring Turkeys in New York

When wild turkeys were found

in New York State in the late 1940s, it was clear that there was once again good habitat for them here. If left on their own, it could take many years for wild turkeys to spread into all the areas they once lived. The New York State Conservation Department (now the Department of Environmental Conservation) decided to help them by raising young for release into the wild. During the 1950s, eggs were collected from turkey nests in the wild and hatched at a game farm in Chenango County. Once they were old enough, the poults (young turkeys) were released into the wild at different sites across the state.

Almost 3,200 game farm turkeys were released during the program, but the farm-raised wild turkeys weren't wild enough to survive on their own. Only a few survived long enough to produce their own young in the wild.

Wildlife managers thought it might be better to capture and move wild turkeys that already knew how to survive. The **"Trap & Transfer"** program began in the spring of 1959. A flock of turkeys netted in Allegany State Park was moved to nearby Cattaraugus County. Wildlife managers were pleased to see that the birds survived and the hens laid eggs and raised young in their new location. The success of this new technique was key to wild turkey restoration.

From the 1960s through the 1990s, more turkeys were trapped and transferred. In all, about 1,400 turkeys were moved within New York State. They survived and reproduced, spreading across the state. They now number more than 250,000. New York was on the leading edge of wild turkey trap and transfer, and sent wild turkeys to the New England states, New Jersey, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Delaware, and the Canadian province of Ontario to help restore their populations as well.

How **Trap & Transfer** Worked!



1

A cannon-fired net was set up in an area where turkeys were known to feed. Food was set out in front of the net to attract the turkeys.



2

This worked best in the winter. Natural food sources were limited due to the weather, and easy-to-get food was an attraction. Wildlife managers hid and waited for turkeys to arrive and begin feeding. (See the net on the right?)



3

They fired the cannons when the birds were within range of the net, and the net was thrown over the turkeys.



4

The birds were quickly removed from the netting.



5

Each bird was weighed, measured, and had a metal band attached to its leg before it was placed in a box for transport.



6

The turkeys were taken to a new area with suitable habitat and released together as a flock.

Wildlife managers returned later to check on the turkeys and see how well they survived in their new home. Helpful information was also provided by hunters and others who observed the birds in the wild. Once turkey populations were large enough, a regulated hunting season was allowed with strict limits on where people could hunt and how many birds a hunter could take.

To help turkeys survive and thrive we need to understand



Wildlife managers use science

to understand the threats that wildlife face: loss of habitat, poor habitat quality, disease, predators, weather, and more. They study animals and their habitats to understand what they require to survive, why their populations change over time, and how they can help wildlife overcome threats. They use the data they gather to make wise choices to help wildlife. The wildlife they help may be rare, common, or over-abundant (too many). What they learn helps them to keep wildlife populations at a level that their local habitat can support.

This information was essential to the wildlife managers who worked to restore turkeys to New York State. It helps today's wildlife managers ensure that turkey populations are healthy now and in the future.

How we study turkeys



DEC

When a band is found and reported or "called in," biologists get information about the bird it came from, starting with where and when it was banded and where and when the band was found.

Sometimes people find the carcasses (dead bodies) of birds killed by predators or hit by cars and call in the band. Every year more than 100,000 hunters harvest more than 35,000 turkeys. When hunters harvest turkeys, they must report each one to DEC. This information, along with reports of birds with leg bands, helps biologists better manage the turkey population.

Satellite transmitters allow biologists to follow an animal's movements when they are out of sight.

With radio or satellite transmitters, researchers can learn how long turkeys survive, or track a hen to a nest to learn about the fate of her eggs or poults.



Pennsylvania Game Commission

What have wildlife managers learned about turkeys?

The dense forests of the 1600s were not the best turkey habitat. People who study turkeys learned that a mix of woodlands with nearby old fields and crop fields offer turkeys more variety, with appropriate areas for nesting, feeding, raising young, and roosting in trees. Where this combination of habitat types is found, turkey populations flourish.



NWTF

Wild turkeys can fly 40 to 55 miles per hour, and they can run more than 12 miles per hour.

Turkeys are the largest and most popular game bird in New York State.

They can even swim!

TURKEY tidbits

Other than humans, the greatest threats to turkey survival today are predation and weather. Raccoons, skunks, and opossums are experts at sniffing out and eating turkey eggs. If the eggs survive and hatch, the young poults might be caught by a variety of predators, including hawks and foxes. Cold, wet weather in spring and summer make it hard for poults to stay



DEC

warm, and some die of hypothermia when their body temperature falls too low. Even though adults are large and can run and fly quickly, they can be killed by predators such as coyotes. Add to this the challenge of trying to survive a cold, snowy winter, and you quickly realize that it's tough out there for a turkey!

Conservation Challenges

While turkeys are now common in New York State, upland sandpiper populations are falling as the grassland habitat they depend upon disappears. Their population today is less than half of what it was 20 years ago. DEC is working with Audubon New York to encourage landowners to protect upland sandpipers and other grassland birds by preserving and improving their habitats. With the help of concerned people, grassland habitats and the wildlife that depend on them will survive.



Philip Jeffrey

Paying for Wildlife Conservation

Most of the money for wildlife improvement projects in New York State comes from the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses, and from the federal government. Money from license sales goes into a special account called the Conservation Fund. It is used for helping all kinds of wildlife, such as butterflies, bears and eagles.

In 1937, Congress passed a law that guaranteed funding to states for wildlife conservation. The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act says that anyone who buys guns, ammunition or archery equipment must pay a special tax. This money is

given to the states to help them manage wildlife populations and the habitats they depend upon. This money makes it possible for states to plan and carry out important wildlife conservation projects.

These federal funds have been used for many projects—the care of lands set aside for wildlife habitat; research on specific species such as turkeys, grouse, songbirds, deer and bats; restoring species like eagles and falcons—to name just a few. Since the start of the program, New York State has received more than \$150 million.

TOMS or GOBBLERS

ADULT MALES
(at least 2 years old)

Reach 17 to 20 pounds

Feathers are very dark;
head featherless
with white, blue
and red skin

Have beards under
their chins and
spurs on backs
of their legs

Sound is a "gobble"

HENS

ADULT FEMALES
(at least 2 years old)

Reach 10 to 13 pounds

Feathers are
brown; head with
few feathers and
blue-grey skin

Make yelp, cluck
and purr sounds

POULTS

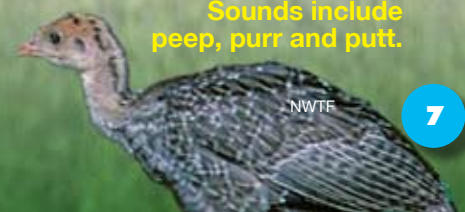
**YOUNG MALES
or FEMALES**
(up to 6 months old)

From about 6
months old until
they become adults,
males are called
jakes, and females
are called jennies

Sounds include
peep, purr and putt.



Edmund J. Coppa



NWTF

The OUTSIDE Page



Eric Dresser

CITIZEN SCIENCE: Keeping Track of Turkeys

We often learn by watching something and recording what we see. The more eyes that are watching, the better the quality of the information gathered. Taking notes about your observations over weeks, months, or even years can help you discover if habitats and wildlife populations are changing.

Each year, DEC receives information from many volunteers—also known as “citizen scientists”—about turkey populations. If you see turkeys when you go outdoors, you could be a citizen scientist, too, and help the

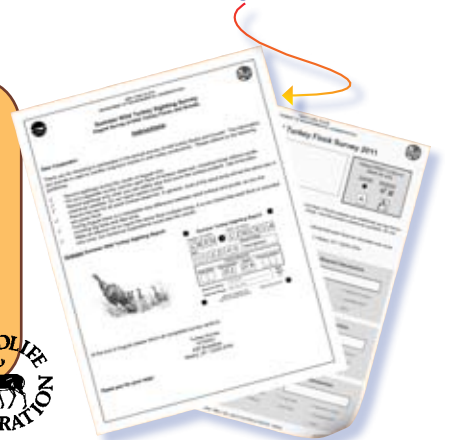
biologists who are helping the turkeys. All you need to do is complete a form when you see turkeys and send the form to DEC. The information is used to figure out if changes are happening in the turkey population and why.

The winter flock survey takes place from January through March, and the summer sighting survey runs during August. Information and forms are available at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html for the winter and summer surveys.

Hunter Education and the Youth Turkey Hunt

Every hunter must have a hunting license. All first-time hunters must pass one or more courses before they can get a hunting license in New York State. Trained instructors certified by DEC teach safe and responsible outdoors practices and the important role of hunters in conservation. To learn more about the Sportsman Education Program go to www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7860.html.

For many families, hunting is a long-standing tradition passed on from generation to generation. A springtime youth turkey hunt encourages this tradition. Go to www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27836.html to learn about New York's Youth Turkey Hunt for 12- to 15-year olds.



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For more information:

- DEC's wild turkey web page www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7062.html
- National Wild Turkey Federation www.nwtf.org/
- All About Birds from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Wild_Turkey/id/
- All About Turkeys by Jim Arnosky (Scholastic, New York, 2008)
- High Ridge Gobbler: A Story of the American Wild Turkey by David Stemple and Ted Lewin (Boyd's Mills Press, Honesdale, PA, 2001)
- Returning Wildlife - Wild Turkeys by John Becker (KidHaven Press, Farmington Hills, MI, 2002)
- Wild Turkeys by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent (Early Bird Nature Books/Lerner Publications Co., Minneapolis, MN, 1999)

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