

All About Wild Turkeys

Wild turkeys can be found throughout Maryland and have a rich history in the state. Worldwide, there are 5 subspecies of wild turkeys. The eastern wild turkey is the only turkey subspecies found in Maryland. Turkeys are generally found in or near forests. They use open areas to feed and use overgrown fields for nesting. Turkeys are **omnivores**. Adults eat acorns, leaves, buds, seeds, fruits, waste grains, and insects. Young turkeys (**poults**) mostly rely on protein rich insects. Wild turkeys spend most of the daylight hours on the ground with other turkeys in a **flock**. They spend night hours in trees to stay out of reach of predators (aka **roosting**). Turkeys are exceptionally adept at sensing danger. Their color vision is 5 times more acute than human vision, and their hearing is 4 times better.

Adult male turkeys are called **gobblers**. Juvenile males are called **jakes**. Gobblers average around 18-22 pounds and can have a wingspan of 5 feet. Adult female turkeys are called **hens**. Juvenile females are called **jennies**. Adult females average half the size of male turkeys.



Hens (Females)

- Hens are dull grey-brown in color.
- Nationally, 10 to 20% of female wild turkeys grow beards (feathers that protrude from chest).
- Hens do not have spurs on their legs.
- Hens make soft clucks and yelps, but never gobble.
- Hens have brown-tipped breast feathers and cone-shaped scat.
- Once bred, a female turkey will usually lay 9-12 eggs in a shallow nest. Over 50% of the resulting poults will not survive.



Toms (Males)

- Toms have featherless heads that are variations of red, white and blue and become more pronounced during breeding season.
- Toms almost always have a beard of whiskers protruding from their chest; beards grow as the bird ages.
- Toms have sharp spurs on their legs and fan their tails to display dominance.
- Toms gobble loudly to display dominance.
- Toms have black-tipped breast feathers and have j-shaped scat.



Beard

A beard is made of modified feathers that hang from the chest of a male turkey. Very rarely, females can have beards.



All About Wild Turkeys (Cont'd)

Did you know? Turkeys make a variety of calls- more than just the 'gobble'! Hens, in particular, have specific calls like the assembly call which is a series of yelps in different volumes. The assembly call is a pleading call made by the hen to assemble her flock once they have ventured away.

To call in wild turkeys, hunters often use a variety of sound-producing tools that mimic different turkey calls. One of the oldest types of calls is a wingbone call which is traditionally made from 3 bones from the turkey's wing. This type of call dates back over 6,000 years and is usually constructed from the hollow bones in a hen turkey's wing. You can make a similar call using a straw or other hollow tube. For fun, add some feathers, beads, and string to make a turkey call necklace!

Make a Turkey Call!

Materials Needed:

- 12-24" piece of string, yarn, leather lace, etc
- 6 pony beads or wooden beads
- 2 feathers
- 4" hollow tube (paper or plastic straws work well)

1. Tie knot(s) on one end of string and add 4 beads to the string.
2. Tie knot on other end of string.
3. Move 2 beads to either end of the string.
4. Fold string in half.
5. Add two remaining beads to folded over string and push beads down, making a necklace.
6. Slide straw in between the 2 new beads.
7. Add feathers to bottom beads on string. (*Optional*: use a small amount of glue to secure feathers).
8. To use call, pucker lips and make a kissing noise through straw.



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