

Got Game? Wild Turkey



Wild Turkeys are a relatively common sighting here at Chippewa Nature Center. Whether you're sitting at the Wildlife Viewing Area, strolling the Arbury Trail, or driving down the Homestead Road, the chances of seeing Wild Turkeys are good. Had you been here 100 years ago however,

you would have been hard-pressed to find a turkey. The Michigan population of Wild Turkeys had been eliminated due to over hunting and loss of habitat.

The presence of Wild Turkeys throughout Michigan is the result of reintroduction programs. Initially, domestic birds were used to reintroduce populations, but those efforts failed. Eventually, wild birds were relocated from areas with healthy populations. Now turkeys are established in most counties in Michigan, and even in some places where they had not been found historically.

Healthy adult turkeys have few natural predators, but the eggs and poults, or young turkeys, are vulnerable to predation from opossums, raccoons, skunks, crows, cats and dogs. Once the poults are 2 weeks old, they are capable of flight and the risk of predation decreases.

As you explore the trails this fall and into the winter, you will notice three distinct groups of turkeys. The toms, or adult males, have the longest beards and gather in one group. The jakes, or young males, gather in another. The hens of all ages, usually lacking beards and more dull in color, gather in a separate group. As the snow begins to fall, follow their tracks and enjoy some turkey watching.

Nature Notes

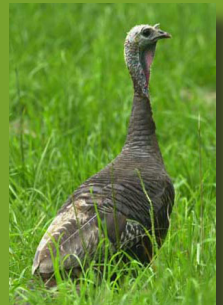


Wild Turkeys from Mexico were taken to Europe in the 1500s.

They were so successful, that English settlers brought these turkeys back as domesticated stock when they colonized North America. Domestic turkeys still possess the white tips on their tail feathers that the Mexican Wild Turkeys possess.

Adult turkeys can run 15 mph and fly up to 55 mph for short distances. They also roost in trees at night and have about a 270 degree field of vision. These adaptations help them avoid predators.

Wild Turkeys eat nuts, fruits, seeds, greens, insects, and waste grain from fields. Poults eat primarily insects, while adult birds tend to eat more plant matter.



Due to reintroduction and introduction efforts, Wild Turkeys are now present in 49 states. The only state lacking a turkey population is Alaska.

Visit the Visitor Center Office for program information.

This inSTALLation is available online at www.chippewanaturecenter.org under the Naturalist Section.