

## Wildlife success story: return of wild turkeys

The wild turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo*, is closely linked to the history of our country and Thanksgiving. Contrary to what most of us were taught in elementary school, turkey may not have been the main course at the pilgrims' first Thanksgiving dinner in 1621. Venison and lobster were the prime dishes in colonial Massachusetts, but no one can argue that turkeys were abundant and a mainstay of the early colonists' diet.

When the first settlers arrived there were about 10 million wild turkeys in North America. Wild turkeys became a major food of settlers as they moved westward across the forested eastern U.S. As the nation grew in the 1800's, wild turkey numbers dwindled. The birds were harvested without restraint. In addition, their forest habitat was cleared for agriculture and wood products. By 1920, wild turkey's had disappeared from 18 of the 20 states of their ancestral range.

In 1804, Lewis and Clark reported seeing wild turkeys along the Missouri River in present Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa and South Dakota. The eastern wild turkey is one of six recognized turkey subspecies and is native to Nebraska. Wild turkeys disappeared from Nebraska around 1915.

Early attempts to restore wild turkeys were not successful because game managers tried to artificially propagate wild turkeys and the pen-raised turkeys did not have the experience and survival skills necessary to live and reproduce in the wild. Restoration through trapping wild turkeys and releasing them was the best solution, but this technique was difficult because turkeys are



wary and not easily captured. Development of the "cannon net" was a major factor in relocating large numbers of wild turkeys for release in other areas.

In 1959, 28 Merriam's turkeys trapped in South Dakota and Wyoming were released in Nebraska in the Pine Ridge area. This release was successful and the Pine Ridge population grew to about 3,000 birds in only four nesting seasons. The Merriam's turkeys were not native to Nebraska, but the habitat of the pine ridge area resembled that of this subspecies' native range.

Other trapping and transplanting efforts occurred until the mid-1980's. Establishment was also helped by some unexpected matings between some wild Merriam's turkeys and game-farm stock. This resulted in a successful establishment of hybrid birds that were successful in the hardwood forest and cropland habitat of the lower Niobrara River and its drainages.

Now Nebraska's wild turkey range includes most major river drainages and the Pine Ridge. Highest population densities

occur in the Pine Ridge and the Niobrara River valley and in parts of the Republican River drainage. Turkeys have also adapted to many small, isolated woodlands, shelterbelts and thinly wooded streams.

Similar capture release programs have occurred in other states and the total U.S. wild turkey population may be approaching four million. According to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the future of Nebraska's wild turkeys appears stable, although habitat destruction and changing land-use patterns could again reduce turkey populations. But, thanks to the recapture and release efforts of the last 40 years along with habitat and hunting management, there are now wild turkeys to hunt and eat, just like the earliest settlers did. Source: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. For more information check out their website: <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/wildtrk1.html> (BPO)

## Lady bird, lady bird, fly away from my home!

We have heard from folks finding lady bird beetles congregating and coming into homes this fall. Most folks say that these lady bugs look a little "different" than what they're used to.

The species folks are likely complaining about is the multi-colored Asian lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*. Its home range is in Japan, Korea and other parts of Asia. "Multicolored" refers to the tremendous color variations in this species, ranging from black with two red spots, to red with 19 black spots, with every combination in between. The most common color seems to be deep orange. There is a black marking on a white background in the shape of the letter "W" on the thorax.

This species was introduced by USDA Agricultural Research scientists in the late 1970's and early 1980's as a biological control agent. It was released throughout the United States and

has spread rapidly. This species has also been reared and sold to gardeners by garden supply companies as a non-toxic way to control pest insects in the garden.

Most lady beetle adults spend the winter months in clusters, protected from the weather. In their native home, *Harmonia axyridis* overwinters in cliffs, but it seems that in the United States it prefers houses. These ladybird beetles are attracted to vertical surfaces and often appear on light-colored walls with a south or southwest exposure. These 1/4" long insects enter wall voids through cracks and settle down for the winter. During periods of warm weather in the winter, these beetles will become active inside which can be frustrating

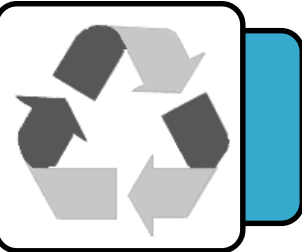


Multicolored Asian lady bugs vary from black with two red spots to red with 19 black spots and all combinations in between.

to human residents.

Lady beetles are beneficial insects and should be preserved, if possible. Locating entry points and sealing up cracks and crevices will help prevent entry. Window screens and doors should be tight-fitting. Concentrate initial efforts on the south and west sides of structures. Vacuuming the clusters from walls are just as effective as insecticides and safer, too. (BPO)

## Environmental Focus



## Wild turkey facts:

■ A turkey's nest is little more than a slight depression in pine-needle duff or forest litter and clutch size averages 11 cream-colored, lightly speckled eggs. Clutches as large as 22

eggs have been observed in Nebraska. Incubation lasts about 28 days and hatching peaks the first week in June.

■ Young turkeys feed on insects that are high in protein, but eat more and more plant food as they grow older. Two to three-week old

poults can eat an average of 3,600 food items every day. During this time, poults will gain as much as a pound every two weeks.

■ Turkeys have keen

senses, day-time vision, hearing and detect color and movement from a half-mile away. They are very attuned to their surroundings and see movement easily.

Most common non-human predators are bobcats, coyotes and golden eagles. Eggs and young turkeys are prey for owls, opossums, raccoons, foxes, skunks, badgers, snakes, feral dogs and cats. Predators are not usually a problem if habitat is good.

■ Turkeys are susceptible to poultry diseases. Populations can be threatened by feeding and over-protection by humans because this encourages an artificially high concentration of birds. Humans can best help turkey populations survive by establishing natural food areas near escape cover and by protecting existing habitat.

■ When weather turns cold, mixed flocks of juvenile birds and hens move to traditional winter roosts and are joined by gobblers. Winter flocks may be as large as 300 birds. (BPO)



Most turkey nests are simple depressions in the forest litter. Clutches average 11 eggs.

## Celebrate America Recycles Day November 15

America Recycles Day has thousands of events across the United States designed to promote the social, environmental and economic benefits of recycling. This day reminds people that taking materials to the recycling site nearest your home, is only the first step. Individuals also should buy products made from recycled materials.

In Lincoln, 54 percent of the aluminum cans recycled are made into other aluminum cans, 100 percent of the cereal boxes and 33 percent of the cardboard recycled are made into recycled products, 28 percent of the recycled steel cans and 27 percent of the glass are reused in products and finally, the Lincoln Journal Star is printed on 25-40 percent recycled paper.

In celebration of America Recycles Day, you are invited to pledge to recycle, to buy recycled and/or support a recycling event on November 15. All pledges will be entered into a random national drawing for the "American Green Dream House"—a new three-bedroom, 2-1/2 bath home built primarily with recycled content and energy-efficient products. No purchase is necessary. However, you must be 18 years old to win. Find a pledge card at 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln, NE.

Other prizes include families of child entrants who could be awarded 25 re-manufactured computers for donation to the winner's choice of school and a computer for the winner's own use; and/or a trip for four to Disney World. This award includes round-trip airfare, hotel accommodations and tickets to the park.

For more information about America Recycles Day, visit [www.americarecyclesday.org](http://www.americarecyclesday.org) and remember to close the loop and buy recycled. (ALH)

