

Forestry Fun Fact: November 2017

History Of The Wild Turkey In Washington State



The Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) was originally introduced into Washington State in 1960 along the Columbia River in Klickitat County although turkey populations grew slowly until more rigorous transplantations in the mid 1980's. Since then turkeys have been on a steady rise in Washington State. It is now possible to observe three of the four main subspecies of wild turkey present in North America in Washington State alone. These subspecies include the Eastern, Rio Grande, and Merriam's.

Identification

A "Hen" is a mature female and a "Jake" is a young male. The immature Jake does not exhibit many of the characteristics of a mature male or "Tom," but rather resembles a Hen.

Habitat

Three subspecies of wild turkey have been introduced in different areas of Washington. All three use slightly different habitats, but all depend on a combination of trees and grasslands for survival.

Behavior

Wild turkeys are most commonly found in flocks and are often seen walking across open fields. They typically get around by walking although they can fly and often roost overnight in tall trees.

Diet

A large proportion of the wild turkey's diet consists of corns, seeds, leaves, grains and berries. Insects and other invertebrates make up the remainder of the diet.

Nesting

In the spring, the male attracts females by gobbling, puffing his feathers, spreading his tail, swelling his face wattles, and dropping his wings. Using this display, one male attracts several females. The female builds a shallow nest at the base of a tree or other dense vegetation, lining it with a small amount of grass or leaves. She lays 10-15 eggs and incubates them on her own. The young leave the nest shortly after hatching and feeding themselves, although the female still tends them and broods them at night.