

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Game
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

WILD TURKEY

Meleagris gallopavo

Family: PHASIANIDAE
B138

Order: GALLIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: G. Ahlborn
Reviewed by: N. Johnson
Edited by: G. Ahlborn

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Uncommon permanent resident; first introduced in 1877. Range expanding in recent decades as introductions continue. Now occurs in local, scattered populations north to Humboldt and Siskiyou cos., and south to Santa Barbara, Riverside, and San Diego cos. At least 2 subspecies have been introduced into California; most have been the Rio Grande turkey (*M. g. intermedia*). Found mostly in deciduous riparian, oak, and conifer-oak woodlands. Prefers large-tree stages with low to intermediate canopy, interspersed with numerous grass/forb openings, near water. Rugged, hilly terrain may be needed, to allow escape from predators. In California, not all suitable habitat is occupied yet.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats seeds, leaves, fruits, buds, acorns, pine nuts, other nuts, and arthropods. Scratches and gleans from ground, plucks, and picks and strips seeds from low plants; also searches and plucks arthropods from ground and low plants.

Cover: Roosts high in tree groves near water. Frequently uses mature trees, often ponderosa, Jeffrey, or digger pine in valley foothill hardwood and valley foothill hardwood-conifer, in sheltered locations, in uneven stands (Jackman and Scott 1975).

Reproduction: Nests on ground in a slight depression, well concealed in thick, low vegetation in, or near, a forest clearing. Nest usually near permanent water.

Water: Requires free water once or twice daily. Seldom roosts or nests more than 1.6 to 3.2 km (1-2 mi) from permanent water.

Pattern: Requires a diverse mosaic of conifer and deciduous stands of different ages, with scattered openings and water. Greater mobility allows turkey to use larger areas than other upland game birds. Suitable undisturbed roosting trees critical.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Often makes movements of 40-80 km (25-50 mi) between winter and summer ranges (Hewitt 1967). Spring dispersal of up to 19 km (12 mi) has been observed in Yuba and Nevada cos.

Home Range: Home range in Montana was 2.6 to 5.2 km² (1 -2 mi²) (Jonas 1966). Flock travels widely within home range, often moving 1.6 to 6.4 km (1-4 mi) daily. In Alabama, Barwick and Speake (1973) reported annual home range of 8 males averaged 398 ha (984 ac), and varied from 355-537 ha (877-1326 ac). Hillestad (1973) reported that spring

and summer home range of 4 nonbreeding hens averaged 150 ha (370 ac), and varied from 65-358 ha (160-884 ac). In Minnesota, Porter (1977) found December home range of 3 males averaged 288 ha (712 ac), and varied from 246-334 ha (608-825 ac). In August, 2 females with broods traversed 142 and 215 ha (351 and 519 ac).

Territory: Territory has been reported as the vicinity of a female. In Oklahoma, was 1.6 to 3.2 ha (4-8 ac) (Thomas 1954); in Missouri, 40-121 ha (100-300 ac) (Dalke et al. 1946).

Reproduction: Polygynous; male calls and struts and gathers a harem of 5, or more, females. Breeds late March to August; peak in May and June. Clutch of 10-12 eggs (range = 5-18) incubated about 28 days (Johnsgard 1973) by female only. Precocial young may fly short distance into roost tree by 1 wk. Female and brood may remain together until spring, occasionally mixing with other broods. Males remain in separate flocks.

Niche: Effect of introduction of turkey on native species is unknown. Removal of herbaceous and deciduous plant species, even-aged management of forests in large blocks, intensive grazing, and removal of old-growth timber, all detrimental. Susceptible to human disturbance. Ravens, crows, skunks, and various snakes prey on eggs. Bobcats, foxes, and domestic dogs are among predators of young and adult.

REFERENCES

- Barwick, L. H., and D. W. Speake. 1973. Seasonal movements and activities of wild turkey gobblers in Alabama. Pages 125-133 in G. C. Sanderson and H. C. Schultz, eds. *Wild turkey management*. Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia.
- Burger, G. V. 1954. Wild turkeys in central coastal California. *Condor* 56:198-206.
- Dalke, P. D., A. S. Leopold, and D. L. Spencer. 1946. The ecology and management of the wild turkey in Missouri. *Missouri Conserv. Comm., Columbia. Tech. Bull. No. 1.* 86pp.
- Graves, W. C. 1975. Wild turkey management in California. Pages 1-5 in L. K. Halls, ed. *Proc. 3rd Annual Natl. Wild Turkey Sympos.* Texas Parks and Wildlife Dep., Austin.
- Grenfell, W. E., B. M. Browning, and W. E. Stienecker. 1980. Food habits of California upland game birds. *Calif. Dep. Fish and Game, Sacramento. Wildl. Manage. Br. Admin. Rep. No. 80-1.* 130pp.
- Hewitt, O. H., ed. 1967. *The wild turkey and its management.* The Wildlife Soc., Washington DC. 589pp.
- Hillestad, H. O. 1973. Movements, behavior, and nesting ecology of the wild turkey in eastern Alabama. Pages 109-123 in G. C. Sanderson and H. C. Schultz, eds. *Wild turkey management.* Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia.
- Jackman, S. M., and J. M. Scott. 1975. Literature review of twenty three selected forest birds of the Pacific Northwest. *U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Reg. 6, Portland OR.* 382pp.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1973. *Grouse and quails of North America.* Univ. Nebraska Press, Lincoln. 553pp.
- Jonas, R. 1966. *Merriam's turkey in southeastern Montana.* Mont. Fish and Game Dep., Helena. *Tech. Bull. No. 3.* 36pp.
- Sanderson, G. C., and H. C. Schultz, eds. 1973. *Wild turkey management.* Univ. Missouri Press, Columbia. 355pp.
- Schorger, A. W. 1966. *The wild turkey: Its history and domestication.* Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman. 625pp.
- Thomas, C. H. 1954. Management implications of the social and spatial behavior of wild turkeys. *Oklahoma Coop. Wildl. Res. Unit, Norman. Prog. Rep. 7:4-11.*