

Turkeys

Turkeys are one of the few large birds native to North America. They are also the largest game birds in this part of the world. Game birds are birds that are hunted for sport. Pheasants, ducks, and quail are other game birds. Turkeys were nearly hunted to extinction by the early 1900s. Then the National Wild Turkey Federation intervened. Turkeys were successfully reintroduced into the wild. Today, there are about six million wild turkeys roaming around open woodland areas from Canada to Mexico.

It is unlikely that one could confuse turkeys with other birds. Turkeys have several easy-to-spot features. Their heads and necks are nearly naked. They can raise their tail feathers to form a vertical fan. Male turkeys have long wattles at the base of their bills and at their throats. Turkeys are also known to have "beards" on their chests. These "beards" are actually feathers, not hairs.

Turkeys can be roughly divided into two groups - domestic and wild turkeys. Domestic turkeys are much bigger than their wild cousins. Domestic turkeys are raised for commercial purposes. They are so heavy that they are unable to fly. In contrast, wild turkeys can fly and run well. Wild turkeys are capable of flying for short distances at 55 miles per hour and running at 25 miles per hour.

Male turkeys (also called gobblers) grunt and show off their beautiful tail feathers to attract female turkeys (also called hens) during the mating season. Hens start to search for a nest site under bushes after mating. They usually lay one egg per day for a period of two weeks. Hens take full responsibility for incubating eggs and looking after their babies (also called poults) once hatched. Poults eat insects, berries, or seeds. Adult turkeys expand that diet to also eat acorns, nuts, and small reptiles. Turkeys usually look for food on the ground in early morning or late afternoon. They roost in trees at night.

Interestingly, wild turkeys came very close to becoming the national bird of the United States. Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, campaigned heavily on behalf of wild turkeys. However, his efforts failed. Bald eagles were chosen to be the national bird of the United States.

A funny anecdote about turkeys is how they got their name! "Turkey" is not just a name of a bird. It is also a name of a country whose territory stretches from Asia to Europe. So, how did turkey, the bird, acquire this foreign name? When the Spanish first found the bird in North America more than 400 years ago, they brought it back to Europe. The English confused it with another bird also called "turkey" and gave it the same name. This other turkey is actually from Africa, but it was imported to England via the Turkish Empire. This mistaken identity was how this native bird of North America got its name.



Turkeys

Questions

- _____ 1. Where do turkeys live?
- A. Northern Asia
 - B. Northern Africa
 - C. Northern Europe
 - D. North America

Name _____



Date _____

_____ 2. Which of the following birds are NOT game birds?

- A. turkeys
- B. pheasants
- C. quail
- D. chicken

_____ 3. Male turkeys are also called _____.

- A. wattles
- B. hens
- C. poults
- D. gobblers

4. Baby turkeys are also known as:

_____ 5. What is the national bird of the United States?

- A. vulture
- B. bald eagle
- C. puffin
- D. turkey

_____ 6. Turkeys have "beards" on their chests. These "beards" are hairs, not feathers.

- A. true
- B. false

_____ 7. Both domestic and wild turkeys can fly and run well.

- A. true
- B. false

_____ 8. Which of the following statements about turkeys is NOT true?

- A. Turkeys got this name because they were birds native to the Turkish Empire.
- B. Turkeys have nearly naked heads and necks.
- C. The largest game birds in North America are turkeys.
- D. Turkeys were almost extinct by the early 1900s.

_____ 9. Who suggested having wild turkeys as the national bird of the United States?

- A. Abraham Lincoln
- B. Thomas Jefferson
- C. John Adams
- D. Benjamin Franklin

