



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

Forest Resources: Eastern Wild Turkey Management

Eastern wild turkey are a native of East Texas forests. Technically, in the eastern subspecies of the wild turkey, adult gobblers weigh between 17-21 pounds while hens weigh 8-11 pounds. Gobblers have a beard composed of modified feathers. Densities range from a few to about 30 turkeys per square mile. Land management can have an effect on their health and numbers. Learning more about wild turkey life cycle and habitat needs is a first step in the restoration of eastern wild turkey.

Reproduction:

Gobblers may breed multiple hens during the spring. After hens are bred, they lay about an egg a day for approximately two weeks. After the last egg is laid, the hen incubates the nest for the next 28 days. Poults hatch together and leave the nest with the brood hen. Poults can fly to roost after about two weeks. Wet weather and predation take a high toll on young poults.

Preferred Habitat Types:

Areas with the highest turkey densities frequently contain mature bottomland hardwoods, older aged pine stands and 15-30% permanent openings. Permanent openings, including fallow fields, young pine plantations, utility rights-of-way and food plots provide crucial nesting and brood habitat in the spring and summer months. Upland pine stands that have been prescribe burned are generally preferred over unburned areas due to the higher percentage of forbs present and greater insect abundance. Home ranges of adult wild turkeys range from 200-1,100 acres depending on forage availability throughout the year. Brood ranges vary from 100-250 acres.

Diet:

Turkeys are opportunistic omnivores feeding on what is seasonably available. The wild turkey's diet is approximately 75% plant matter and 25% animal matter over the course of a year. Plant matter includes hard mast (acorns), soft mast (blackberries, etc.), grass and forbs. Animal matter is composed of insects (particularly grasshoppers, ants, beetles, spiders) and snails. Turkey poults are particularly dependent on insects during their first few weeks due to the insects' high protein content and the poults' rapid growth.

Diseases:

Avian pox and histomoniasis are the two primary diseases affecting turkey populations, although salmonellosis and mycoplasmosis may also affect populations. Turkeys are also infested with a variety of external and internal parasites such as ticks, mites, lice, trematodes and cestodes.