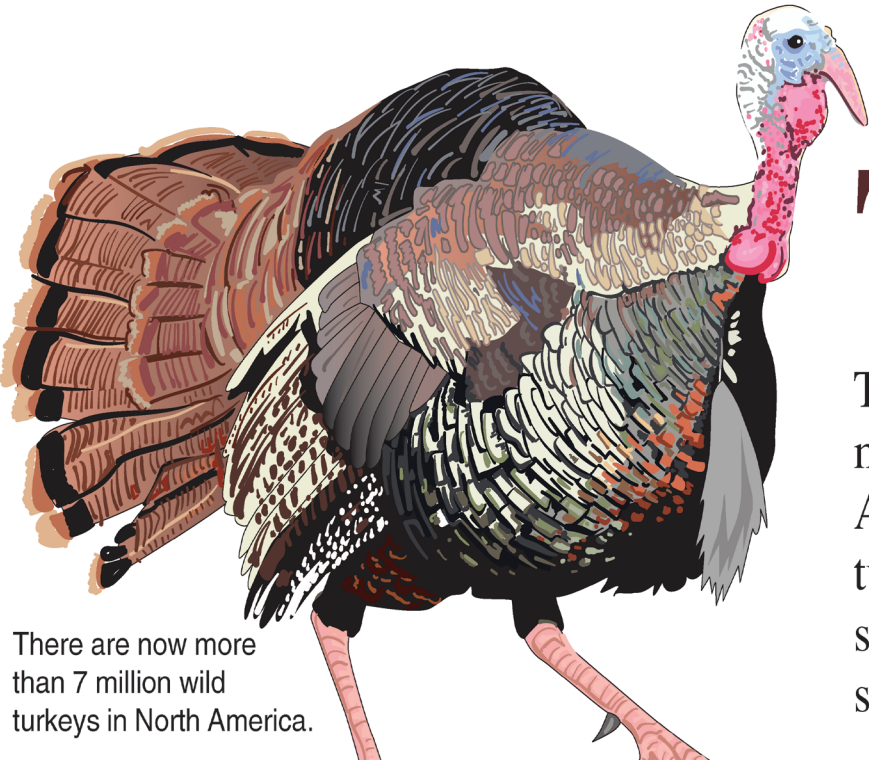




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Happy Thanksgiving

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There are now more than 7 million wild turkeys in North America.

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TURKEYS

The North American turkey got its name in the mid-1500s, when British settlers confused it with the African guinea fowl, a bird known at that time as a turkey chicken. Domestic and wild turkeys are the same species, but they differ significantly due to selective breeding and habitats.

In the wild

There are five subspecies of wild turkey in the U.S.: the eastern, Rio Grande, Merriam's, Osceola (Florida) and Gould's. Usually these birds breed within the same subspecies, but when habitats overlap, crossbreeding may happen to create hybrids.

Wild turkeys can run at speeds up to 25 mph.

The pilgrims probably hunted and ate the **eastern wild turkey**.

These birds are sometimes called forest turkeys.

What they eat

Wild turkeys are omnivorous and eat a variety of food, including grasses, grains, insects, nuts, berries and small reptiles.

Flight

Wild turkeys are strong fliers capable of reaching high speeds and roosting in trees. They can manage short distances at speeds up to 55 mph.

Behavior & habitat

The wild turkey lives in the woods of North America. Turkeys spend their days foraging for food and their nights in low tree branches.

Wild turkeys spend a lot of time on the ground, where they feed and lay eggs. These birds have strong survival skills, well adapted to life in the forest.

Plumage

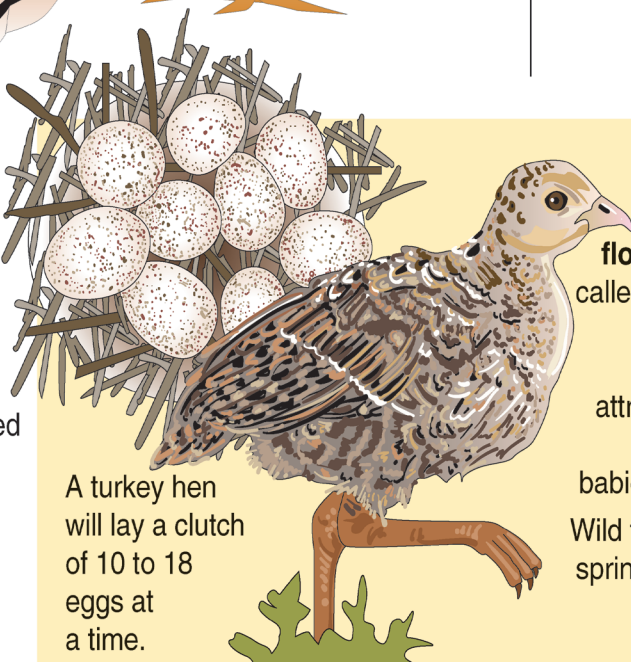
Wild turkeys have dark, richly colored feathers with iridescent patterns for camouflage.

The wild turkey's head and wattles change color with mood. The head can be red, pink, white or blue.

Wild turkeys almost became extinct in the 1930s due to overhunting and deforestation.

Turkeys make more than 20 distinct vocalizations. The gobble sound can be heard a mile away.

Male turkeys are about twice as large as females.



A turkey hen will lay a clutch of 10 to 18 eggs at a time.

The turkey is one of the earliest animals domesticated and raised for food in America. Domestic turkeys were first raised by Native Americans in Mexico and Central America, who began breeding them about 2,000 years ago. Today, there are many domestic turkey breeds found around the world.

Over the years, farmers have bred the biggest, meatiest birds. Among domesticated turkeys, several subspecies have been developed. Domestic turkeys weigh twice as much as wild turkeys.

The first presidential pardons were granted to domestic turkeys in 1947. Since then, every president has "pardoned" two birds before Thanksgiving. The pardoned birds live out their days on farms.

What they eat

Domestic turkeys are typically fed nutritional pellets, but they may also enjoy vegetable snacks.

Flight

Because domestic turkeys are bred for rapid growth and large muscles, they are twice as heavy as wild turkeys. As a result, most have lost the ability to fly.

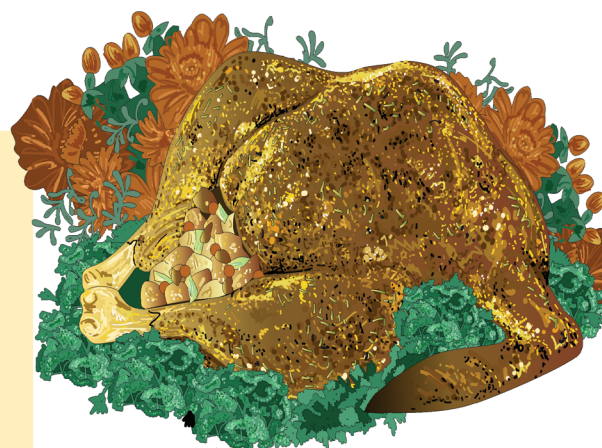
Plumage

Today, most commercially bred turkeys have white plumage.



Thanksgiving tradition

Thanksgiving is sometimes called "Turkey Day" because this bird is traditionally served as dinner on this holiday. More turkeys are consumed on Thanksgiving than on any other holiday. The average American eats 18 pounds of turkey annually.



Eating turkeys

Wild turkey meat is known for its darker color, firmer texture and richer, more intense flavor compared to the mild, lighter meat of domestic turkeys.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.britannica.com>; The National Wild Turkey Federation; <https://www.nwtf.org>; <https://www.allaboutbirds.org>; <https://www.smithsonianmag.com>

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