



Let's Talk Turkey

South Carolina Town Is Home to the World's Only Museum Honoring Wild Turkeys

Edgefield, South Carolina (October 12, 2017) – Thanksgiving will be here in just a few weeks, which means it's time to turn our attention to the centerpiece of America's favorite food-centric holiday. Let's talk turkey!

No place knows more about the wild version of November's favorite bird than the town of Edgefield, South Carolina, located in the state's [Old 96 District](#). Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Edgefield is where you'll find the Wild Turkey Center, official headquarters of the National Wild Turkey Federation. The organization, which is dedicated to the conservation of wild turkeys, operates the [Winchester Museum](#) to honor America's greatest bird. (Well, at least in our opinion.)

In case you want to dazzle the kinfolk over the dinner table at this year's Thanksgiving celebration, here's a heaping helping of turkey trivia served up from the museum's collection.

Gobble up all the juicy details, from A to Z!

Alaska

This is the only state where wild turkeys can't be found – not because it's too cold, but because the state doesn't have a long growing season. There's just not enough food for turkeys to survive.

Beard

All male wild turkeys and between 10 and 20 percent of females have beards, which grow longer as the bird gets older. The longest they can grow is about a foot, though a female's beard (if she has one) would more likely be short and wispy.

Call

A hunter's tool, the turkey call was created by Native Americans and dates back about 4,000 years. The original calls were made from hollowed-out turkey bones, but these days creating calls is its own art form. The largest one ever crafted, which is on display at the Winchester Museum, measures 16 feet long by nine feet wide.

Diet

Wild turkeys are omnivores, meaning they eat plants (nuts, berries, grass, oats and corn) and animals (crickets, grasshoppers and worms). One of their favorite foods is chufa, a peanut-like tuber.

Eastern

This is one of the five subspecies of wild turkey, and it's the most populous. Other subspecies include Florida (or Osceola), Gould's, Merriam's and Rio Grande.

Feathers

Each wild turkey has 5,000 to 6,000 feathers.

Gobbler

This is the proper term for an adult male, who might also be called a "tom." An adult female is called a "hen."

Hearing

Wild turkeys have an excellent sense of hearing, which allows them to detect a threat even when they're intent on finding food. They have an uncanny ability to figure out the source of a sound, which makes them challenging prey for hunters.

Indigenous

Wild turkeys are found throughout North America. You may recall hearing that founding father Benjamin Franklin pushed for the wild turkey to be the national symbol instead of the bald eagle. That may be a myth, or it may be the truth ... but it demonstrates that this bird has been around since before colonial days.

Jake and Jenny

A young male is called a "jake," while a young female is a "jenny."

Killers

Young wild turkeys are pursued by many predators, including bobcats, foxes and eagles. Opossums, raccoons and snakes like to eat turkey eggs. That said, the most common killer of young birds isn't another animal at all; it's weather, as many die of hypothermia.

L-Shaped

A male turkey scat looks like the letter "L" or "J," whereas female turkeys poop in curly shaped mounds. (And yes, we're delighted that we got to use the word "poop" in a press release!)

Melanistic

This is one of four feather colorations in wild turkeys, and it's extremely rare. It features all-black feathers, like a raven would have. Other colorations include smokey-gray, which is the most common; albino, in which the bird has pink eyes and white legs; and erythritic, which is an overall red coloration.

Native Americans

The first people to see and eat wild turkeys were American Indians.

Oddities

The Winchester Museum maintains a collection of wild turkey rarities. These include birds with multiple beards (one has five!), multiple spurs (read more about that body part later), and "bumble toes" that make it look like the animal's foot has been stung by a bee.

Poult

A baby turkey is called a “poult.” Females lay eight to 12 eggs at a time, perhaps six to 10 of those will hatch, and only about half of those will make it to adulthood.

Quick

Wild turkeys can run up to 25 mph and fly at speeds up to 55 mph. Domestic turkeys don't run very fast and can only fly when they're very young. So ... score one for the wild guys.

Radios

Thanks to the efforts of the National Wild Turkey Federation, scientists track turkeys with radios that send out signals and let them know whether the birds are alive, if they're getting enough food and if they're having babies.

Strut

A male turkey looking for some attention from the gals will strut, dropping his wings to touch the ground, holding his tail in a vertical position, lowering his head and doing a little “dance” while making a spitting and drumming sound.

Taste

Turkeys can detect the same tastes as humans – sweet, sour, salty and bitter – but have very poor sense of taste because they don't have many taste buds. They don't seem to like very bitter foods, however, and will discard them when eating.

Utilitarian

Native Americans ate turkeys, but also used their body parts for tools and decoration. If a male's spur – the sharp point on each foot – was long and straight enough, it could be used as the tip of an arrow. A feather adhered to an arrow made it fly faster and straighter. Often feathers were used as sacred objects in ceremonies, or as an accessory in hair or on clothing.

Vision

Wild turkeys have excellent daylight vision and can quickly detect movement and assimilate detail. To overcome their monocular vision, turkeys turn their heads so they can better judge distance.

Weight

Female wild turkeys can weigh between 10 and 15 pounds, and males can tip the scales at 20 to 25 pounds.

X-treme Honor

The wild turkey has been declared the state game bird for four states – Alabama, Massachusetts, Oklahoma and – of course – South Carolina.

Years

Turkeys don't live very long. Males may reach 10 years old, while females might make it to about six years.

Zany Body Parts

Wild turkeys have some crazy-sounding parts. For example, the “snood” is what you call that thing that dangles over the bird’s beak. It’s used as part of the bird’s communication system, along with the “carnucles,” which are the red, fleshy bumps on the turkey’s neck.

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