



WILD TURKEY

Meleagris gallopavo



The Wild Turkey is a large, ground-dwelling bird, although it flies well and regularly roosts in trees at night. There are five subspecies of Wild Turkey in North America. This specimen, which is a Mexican (or Gould's) Turkey, was collected in Mexico. It is readily recognized by the white tips to its tail feathers. It is the largest of the five subspecies. In addition to being larger, male turkeys have a completely bare head and neck and a prominent beard, which is simply a tuft of elongated, barbless feathers. During the breeding season, males gather on display grounds, where they erect their tails and the feathers on their body to impress the females, who choose a mate based on these ritualized displays. Males do not take part in parental care.



SPECIES QUICK FACTS

SIZE

The Wild Turkey can be up to 45 inches in length, with a wingspan of up to 57 inches.

WEIGHT

The weight of a Wild Turkey can range from 5.5 to 23 pounds, depending on the subspecies. Males are larger than females.

FOOD HABITS

Wild Turkeys are omnivorous. They mostly eat acorns and other nuts of trees, but they will also eat berries, roots, and insects. They will occasionally eat snakes and frogs.

HABITAT

Wild Turkeys tend to be found in open areas near woods or brush.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Wild Turkeys are found throughout the United States and south into Mexico. They have been introduced to many areas of the western United States for hunting purposes.

FUN FACT

Wild Turkeys were first domesticated by the Aztecs of southern Mexico. Most domestic turkeys descend from that original stock, which was taken to Europe by the early Spanish explorers before being brought back over to the eastern United States by the colonists.