

Acton WildAware
Beacon Article for February 25, 2016

By Paula Goodwin

Successful Reintroduction of Wild Turkeys and Fisher

Sociable Wild Turkeys, traveling in roaming flocks, stay in one area for a while before traveling miles away to inhabit a new favorable location. Fisher, a solitary member of the weasel family, creates a carefully marked territory which it will abandon if another fisher moves in. Acton's forest and field habitats support both species' needs for food and shelter. Both species were eliminated in the 1800s due to habitat loss but each continue to thrive after being reintroduced during the 1960s and 1970s.

Wild Turkey

Beginning in March, winter flocks will break up as male "Gobblers" and female hens begin breeding. Hens make shallow nests using leaf litter in place to lay 10-14 eggs which incubate for about 28 days. The success of turkey nests can range up to 50% depending upon habitat conditions, and environmental factors. Predators include raccoons, coyotes, skunks, bobcats, snakes, owls and foxes. The 24 hour hatching process begins with pipping, when the poult rotates in the egg and uses its egg tooth (hard, sharp spike on the upper beak) to break the shell open. Within 12 to 24 hours, the poult is ready to follow the hen to fields where they eat an abundance of protein rich insects that will support their growth. Their insect diet includes beetles, grasshoppers, flies, and moths. In fields and forests, older poults and adults consume a varied diet including forbs such as clover, sunflower, day lily and milkweed, as well as a variety of grasses, fruits, berries, seeds, grains and favored hickory nuts and acorns. Wild Turkeys are crepuscular, (most active at dawn and dusk). In winter, turkeys use their strong three-toed feet to scratch and dig through up to 6 inches of snow to look for food, mostly tree nuts. When it is necessary for them to move quickly, Wild Turkey hens will usually fly short distances, while male turkeys will run. Adult turkeys and older poults fly up into tall trees where they also roost at night for safety. Wild turkeys can swim by tucking their wings their wings close to their sides, spreading their tail feathers and kicking. Most sources indicate that wild turkeys have a lifespan of about 3 to 5 years. Conservation status: least concern, population rising. In 1991 the Wild Turkey was recognized as the state game bird in Massachusetts.

Citizen Science-Wild Turkey Brood Survey

Do you sometimes see turkeys roaming in your yard or neighborhood? You may want to participate in Mass Wildlife's annual Wild Turkey Brood Survey, conducted from June 1-August 31 each year. A brood consists of a turkey hen and her offspring (poults). Mass Wildlife is interested in turkey brood observations from all regions of the state, from rural and/or developed areas. For more information and to participate, search [://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/fish-wildlife-plants/turkey-brood-survey.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/fish-wildlife-plants/turkey-brood-survey.html)

Trouble with Turkeys?

During spring and summer, protect your gardens and don't let turkeys intimidate you. Dogs tethered on a run can be effective in scaring turkeys away from gardens. Netting is another option to employ. Don't hesitate to scare or threaten a bold, aggressive turkey with loud noises, swatting with a broom or water sprayed from a hose.

For more information about Wild Turkeys:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/wild_turkey/lifehistory

<http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/symbol-official-item/massachusetts/state-bird/wild-turkey>

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dfg/dfw/wildlife/wildlife-living/living-with-turkeys.pdf>

<http://www.turkeymanagement.com/nesting/>

Fisher

Although elusive, fisher can be found in Acton, in areas that provide mixed forest. They avoid traveling in large open areas, resting in hollow logs, stone walls, tree cavities and brush piles. Fisher are omnivorous, primarily feeding on squirrels, small rodents, rabbits, birds, eggs, fruit, porcupines, and carrion. They do not hibernate, actively hunting year round. Fishers breed from February to March but due to a process known as delayed implantation, do not give birth to kits until the following spring. Average litter size is 3 kits that are weaned at 4 months of age. The young begin hunting their own prey at 5 months and remain with their mother until early fall, then disperse to live on their own. Primarily nocturnal, fisher have been observed at all times of day. Fishers seek out medium sized prey, which can include domestic rabbits and house cats. Keeping cats indoors and providing securely locked outdoor pens for rabbits and poultry is highly recommended.

For more information about Fisher:

Mass Wildlife website: www.mass.gov/masswildlife

<http://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/mammals/fishers>

Paula Goodwin is a member of the Acton Conservation Commission who introduced WildAware with Acton Natural Resource Assistant Bettina Abe. WildAware is a program sponsored by the Town of Acton Natural Resources Department that began in September and will continue through the summer of 2016. The purpose of WildAware is to educate the community about the existence and habits of wild creatures, and the goal is increased community awareness of shared habitats. For information, call 978-929-6634 or send email to nr@acton-ma.gov.