



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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WILD TURKEY DISAPPEARING, RESTORATION WORK UNDERWAY

The native wild turkey, symbol of Thanksgiving Day, is in danger of extermination unless the efforts of conservationists to restore it succeed, according to reports submitted to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes by officials of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Wild turkeys were not native throughout New England even in the days of the Pilgrims, Service officials said. In fact, the area surrounding Boston was in the extreme northern range of the bird. Except for a few birds on private areas, true wild turkeys are not found in the New England States today.

Best range of the wild turkey is in the southern part of the country and down into Mexico. Harold L. Blakey, Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and a recognized authority on the species, states that the turkey is now restricted to less than half its original range and occupies less than 1 acre for each 100 acres on which they could be sustained.

Exploitation of habitat by power projects, agricultural interests, timber interests, and other factors drove the bird out of many areas. But the wild turkey can be saved, Blakey believes, if Federal, State, and local game administrators investigate local possibilities and reintroduce the wild turkey on good areas.

Restoration projects are being conducted on Federal areas. With the aid of Federal funds under the Pittman-Robertson Act wild turkeys are being restored on State areas also in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Originally important as a source of food for early settlers in many sections of the country, the wild turkey is now economically valuable as an object of sport.

Nonmigratory, the wild turkey is a wide-ranging bird and requires a larger area on which to roam than do most native species. When submarginal lands and wooded areas were taken over for farms, the bird was driven from its best nesting and feeding grounds.

How many wild turkeys remain in the United States is not known. No valid estimates for the country as a whole have been made, but wildlife authorities agree that there is little doubt that the bird's population is alarmingly low.

The name turkey is not American in origin. It comes from Africa by way of England. In the seventeenth century, guinea fowl were transported from the Dark Continent to the British Isles via Turkey. The English called the bird "turkey cocke."

When the American bird was shipped to England, people became confused and began calling this species the turkey also. The name was later adopted in America. When the American colonists were selecting a bird for the National emblem, Benjamin Franklin suggested the turkey. Though it never became the emblem of the country, it did, by popular consent, become the symbol of Thanksgiving Day--and freedom.