



**Wildlife
Management
Division**

2006-2007

Wild Turkey Restoration Summary



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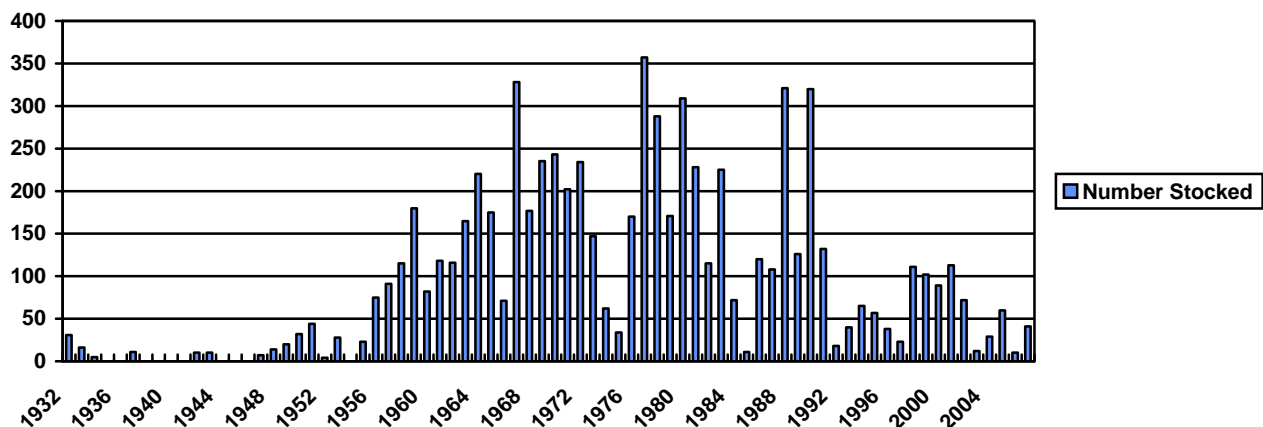
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Introduction: Wild turkeys were abundant in Arkansas during the 1800s based on reports by early explorers and settlers. Early Arkansans readily utilized turkeys for food on a year-round basis; this over-exploitation combined with habitat destruction resulted in diminishing numbers of birds as the state became more settled. By the early 1900s, turkeys had been eliminated from large areas of the state. With the formation of the Game & Fish Commission in 1915, regulations protecting turkeys were implemented, but turkey numbers continued to decrease, such that turkeys probably reached their lowest point in historic times during the 1930s.

Efforts to restore turkeys were initiated soon after the formation of the Game & Fish Commission. Hen turkeys were made illegal to harvest in 1918; state game refuges were set up in the 1920s; and pen-raised wild turkeys (many raised at state game hatcheries) were released at least as early as the 1930s. None of these or other early efforts resulted in restoration of turkeys on a statewide basis. In a mid-1940s survey of Arkansas game animals, an estimated 7,000 turkeys remained in Arkansas, mostly in the Gulf Coastal Plain and along the Mississippi River.

Amendment 35 to the state constitution in 1944, which restructured the Game & Fish Commission, called for the restoration of native wildlife species, including wild turkeys. About this time, wildlife managers realized that wild turkeys rather than pen-raised birds were needed to restore populations. The perfection of cannon netting techniques in the early 1950s--where a large net is propelled over a flock of turkeys attracted to bait--resulted in wildlife managers being able to capture wild turkeys in large numbers to efficiently restock depleted areas. Since 1932, nearly 7,000 wild-trapped turkeys have been stocked in 73 of Arkansas's 75 counties, with the bulk of that number translocated between 1960-1990 (Fig. 1). A large percentage of stocked turkeys were captured on Brandywine Island near West Memphis in the 1960s and 1970s. Restocking efforts have resulted in turkeys being restored to almost all suitable habitats in Arkansas, with 2007 springtime populations estimated at about 110,000 turkeys statewide. Currently, turkey restoration in Arkansas continues as a low-priority project, mostly on large tracts of re-forested lands (e.g., CRP, WRP, acquired refuge lands) in eastern Arkansas.

Fig. 1. Number of wild turkeys stocked annually in Arkansas, 1932-2007.



2006-2007 Restoration Summary: Turkey stocking requests, both from the public and from within the agency, are reviewed annually by the Wild Turkey Committee and staff of the Wildlife Management Division, and recommendations for stocking are approved by AGFC administrators. In 2006-07, a total of 12 stocking requests were reviewed using agency procedures, including examination of aerial photographs, site visits and assignment of ranking scores based on established

criteria. Five (5) stocking sites were recommended for stocking with approximately 70 turkeys. These sites included: Hampton Reservoir (this release started in 2005) in Arkansas County; Benson Lake in Arkansas County; Dutch Slough in Lee County; Big Creek in Chicot County and Horseshoe Lake (hens only) in Crittenden County. The remaining seven sites received low ranking scores as habitat was rated insufficient or marginal for turkeys. These sites were not recommended for stocking.

2006-2007 Restoration Summary: cont.:

In general, AGFC attempts to trap wild turkeys for restoration from areas with high densities of birds and in areas where hunting is either restricted or not allowed (these areas are actually quite rare in Arkansas). Distance to restoration sites and availability of trained turkey trappers are additional factors used to decide where to trap turkeys. Potential trapping sites for winter 2006-2007 included Choctaw Island Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), the Small Arms Impact Area on Camp Robinson, Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Jamestown Independence County WMA, JFK Park/Greer's Ferry dam site and private land in Pope, Searcy and Cleburne counties (hens only).

In winter 2006-2007, AGFC personnel had a difficult time capturing turkeys, primarily because of a good acorn crop in central and northern Arkansas and because of feral hog use of bait sites on Choctaw WMA. Forty-one (41) turkeys captured with six rocket net shots were stocked on

four sites. Three sites were considered finished, and two sites remain on the approved list to be finished or stocked in winter 2007-08. Table 1 has been prepared to show the number and location of all turkeys stocked in Arkansas in winter 2006-07. Figure 2 shows the location of all turkey stockings since 1990, including the four sites where turkeys were stocked this past winter.

The author would like to thank turkey trappers David Henley, Alton Case, Matt Mourot and Kiah Gardner, as well as a host of National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) volunteers and AGFC personnel who assisted with baiting, trapping, transport and release of birds. Mr. Ben Mense, Refuge Manager, graciously allowed trappers to take 18 wild turkeys from Holla Bend NWR for restoration efforts. At least 450 work hours were logged by trappers, with many more hours expended by turkey baiters, trapping assistants and turkey transport/release personnel. Photo credits: Mike Widner and Rachel Spaulding.

Table 1. Wild turkeys stocked in Arkansas in winter 2006-2007.

County	Site	Adult Male	Juvenile Male	Adult Female	Juvenile Female	Total	Status*	Source**
Arkansas	Hampton Reservoir	2	3	5	2	12	C	1, 2
Arkansas	Benson Lake	2	1	6	2	11	C	1, 2
Lee	Dutch Slough	4	0	11	0	15	C	1,3
Chicot	Big Creek	0	3	0	0	3	I	2
Crittenden	Horseshoe Lake	-	-	-	-	-	I	-
Totals		8	7	22	4	41		

* - Releases designated C are complete; those designated I are incomplete and will be stocked next winter.

** - Sources (trap sites) include:

- 1 = Camp Robinson, Pulaski and Faulkner Counties (12 gobblers)
- 2 = Holla Bend NWR, Pope County (3 gobblers, 15 hens)
- 3 = Jamestown WMA, Independence County (11 hens)

Figure 2. Wild turkey stocking sites in Arkansas during the 1990s (blue dots), 2000-2006 (red dots) and winter 2006-2007 (red stars).

