

Wild Turkeys are Flourishing in Quebec

by John A. Viau

I saw my first wild turkey in Quebec over 30 years ago, while I was sitting in a deer stand in southwestern Quebec, Covey Hill region, which is located about 1/8 mile from the New York State/Quebec border line. The big tom turkey casually sauntered across an open field, close to where I was watching for deer, and I observed him for a good fifteen minutes as he strolled by.

From that first turkey sighting many years ago, the wild turkey population has grown at an amazing rate, and turkey sightings have become commonplace. Further, driving on back roads has become much more hazardous because of the possibility of colliding with a wild turkey. In the spring you may occasionally see as many as twenty to thirty hens out in the middle of an open field, accompanied by 1/2 dozen or more big turkey gobblers strutting about, displaying their gorgeous tail fans and wooing the ladies. Sometimes a troop of 8 or 9 nine jakes (young turkey gobblers not yet fully mature) are hanging around the outskirts and watching poults (chicks) parading around under the hens' watchful eyes.



By late fall and early winter, turkeys are everywhere, and it is common to see as many as 80 to 100 in one field. On my biggest day of turkey watching I made a rough count of around 300 turkeys in one 50 acre field! This is a phenomenal increase in the turkey population, and the

only possible mitigating factor would be if we had a really severe winter, with high snowfall levels and a prolonged period of extremely harsh weather. These factors could certainly decimate the population.

In 2008, the Quebec show. Later in the summer you could possibly see the turkey hens with their brood of

[Ministry of Forests, Wildlife and Parks](#) instituted a spring



season for male turkeys only. That was when I bagged my first big gobbler, who weighed-in at almost 26 lbs and had a 9 3/4 inch beard! Since then, I have hunted every spring and, on three occasions, managed to bag two turkeys, which is the legal limit per person per season for Zone 8 South. Turkey hunting is one of the most challenging and exciting hunts that can be experienced, but it takes a lot of dedication, skill and a little bit of good luck.

Following are some interesting statistics. Over the last 5 years, the wild turkey harvest has grown from 4,342 birds in 2015 to **5,902** in 2016. The take grew to 7,796 in 2017 followed by 7,600 in 2018. A record harvest of 8,024 was set in 2019!

Biologist François Lebel speculates that there is a good possibility that next year there may be a fall hunt in addition to the spring hunt, and there is also the possibility of allowing a hunter to take either a female or a male turkey. This would allow biologists to control the exploding population of wild turkeys in some areas of Quebec, where they have become a real nuisance to farmers.

Stephane Alarie, President of the Outaouais – Laurentides UPA, indicated that, since the turkeys are eating away our net profits at an alarming rate, something must be done, and soon. “The game is more abundant and the hunters have refined their techniques,” said François Lebel, the biologist from the [Ministry of Forests, Wildlife and Parks](#) who oversees the event. “It has been a very big hunting season.”

Despite the cull, the number of turkeys out there continues to grow and colonize regions of the province where they

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were indeed rare birds in the past. If this is the case, then the hunters are not far behind! The move is to the north, to the Lanaudiere and Laurentien regions, and there have been significant populations of wild turkeys established in the Eastern Townships, Monterégie, Quebec Center and Outaouais regions for several years now. Quebec created the wild turkey hunt (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) in 2008, after reintroducing the species to southern Quebec in 2000. As well, the population was augmented by a natural northward migration from the states of Vermont and New York.

Between 2005-2007, an experimental and highly restrictive wild turkey hunt was initiated by the [Ministry of Forests, Wildlife and Parks](#) in the Montreal region (Zone 8 South). Its goal was to help assess the population of wild turkeys and to determine the potential impact of hunting on bird numbers. The insight resulting from this trial program led to the establishment of a regular hunting season in the spring of 2008. Since then, the popularity of this activity has increased dramatically, with a record 14,266 permits purchased and **5,884** birds harvested in 2016. The success rate (at least one bird harvested per hunter) was recorded at 31%, one of the highest-observed rates in the northeast. Additionally, 10.2% of hunters were able to harvest a second bird, a record high since the introduction of this regulation in pacific hunting zones in 2014. Currently, according to government surveys of this activity, the annual economic contribution of this activity is estimated at over \$5 million.

In closing, let me mention that you really haven't enjoyed a turkey dinner until you've sat down to a scrumptious meal of a wild turkey, roasted to perfection, with all the trimmings. YUM, YUM!

Note: In paragraphs 5 and 8 the number of birds harvested are different. These numbers were taken directly from government statistics. There is a slight difference in the numbers quoted. However, the numbers show there was slightly fewer than 6,000 birds harvested.



ARLIE C. FEARON

(819) 562-3473
(819) 562-6996

1486 Wellington St.
Sherbrooke (QC) J1M 1K9

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