

NOVEMBER 1 - 14, 2019 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

WILD TURKEY



Wild Turkey, "Tom" *Meleagris gallopavo*, Male,
© Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Myth – That Benjamin Franklin wanted the Turkey to be our National symbol is simply not fact! However, Franklin did write that the turkey is "a much more respectable bird, and with that a true original Native of America...He is besides, though a little vain and silly, a Bird of Courage." Unfortunately, this quoted part is responsible for the continuing myth that Franklin wanted the turkey to be our National symbol instead of the Bald Eagle.

The North American Wild Turkey began to disappear from New England in 1672. That year travel writer John Josslyn wrote that the English and Indians "had destroyed the breed (in New England), so that 'tis very rare to meet with a wild Turkey in the Woods."

If you look at old photographs, 1800's, of the countryside here in Vermont, most of the forests were cleared. You could stand on a forestless hill and look for miles in either direction across cleared land once covered with trees. The only woods were spotty areas kept by farmers for their wood supplies. Sheep farming and eventually early dairy farming kept the turkeys from being reintroduced. Farmers, hunters and lumberjacks had removed the Wild Turkey from the state and had nearly removed it to extinction.

What we all had in the past for Thanksgiving dinner was simply the domestic turkey.

By 1732 much of the population of wild turkeys had been extirpated from New England. Vermont had none by 1842, Connecticut saw its last wild turkey in 1813 and Massachusetts lost its last one by 1851.

With a large bird that did not migrate and was easy to kill during the winter and tasty when cooked, one can imagine how quickly the demise of the wild turkey became.

Understanding how quickly humans killed off millions of passenger pigeons causing their mass extinction from the North American continent and the world, one can imagine how quickly and easy it would have been for the wild turkey to go the same way! There were stories of people driving flocks of turkeys into traps or using large circular human drives around a turkey roost and moving them to the center where they were slaughtered in great numbers. Today we have little understanding about the wildlife devastation humans caused during the 1800's and early 1900's,

Not until 1969-1970 were Wild Eastern Turkeys released into Vermont. By 1973 the Vermont population of Wild Turkeys was estimated at 600 birds and growing. By the late 1980's and early 1990's the populations were estimated between 9K-12K birds.

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PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE



Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria*, shores of a pond in Vermont. © Dick Harlow

What are Invasive Plants? They are similar to invasive birds. They have been brought here from some country foreign to the North American continent. They have no natural enemies or specific predators to keep them in check. Consequently, there is no immediate natural bounds within which they can be held, and a raft of food that has no resistance to their predation; therefore, they multiply, inhabit and compete more successfully than native plants and wildlife. People who sometimes unintentionally bring non-native plants, fungi, insects or release non-native birds into the United States did and are doing a huge disservice to our habitat, food supply and native wildlife.



Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria*, roadside unmowed area at EastView. © Dick Harlow

Purple Loosestrife is invasive and is a perfect example of what happens when released in a non-competitive environment. They will out-compete native plants in their specific habitat. Because people think the flowers are pretty or masses of these miniature shrubs

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are good to look at, they are less apt to try and keep the plant under control. Therefore, people will not exercise restraint when trying to control the expansion of this invasive plant.

Understandably, seeing a colorful flower or a mass of purple flowers along the side of the road is probably beautiful. However, others who are concerned for the general welfare of wildlife see this purple mirage as invasive and detrimental to native plants and animals. Purple Loosestrife has no recognized food value or habitat addition to native wildlife.

Which is more important, having something nice to look at or saving habitat for native plants and animals? Perhaps unknowingly, we are dependent on our native plants and wildlife. Their welfare is important to our wellbeing. Both native plants and animals need your help.

BIRD FEEDERS

Note: Please disinfect your bird feeders before putting them out this Fall and Winter. It is easy for birds to pick up disease from feeders.

Make a weak solution of Clorox, then rinse thoroughly. Or, you can purchase bird feeder cleaners, e.g. from Amazon or other stores.

Many Thanks.

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Gray Squirrel – checking bird feeders
Coyotes – heard howling
Red Fox - hunting

Weather Tidbits

Month of NOVEMBER 1-14, 2019

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 66.2 mm or 2.6 inches

Overcast Days: 8