

A POSSIBLE LONGEVITY RECORD FOR THE WILD TURKEY

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Abstract.—A male Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) found dead in Franklin County, Massachusetts, was at least 15 yr old, making it the oldest known Wild Turkey of any subspecies on record. Previous longevity records varied from 9.5 yr for Merriam's turkey to 14 yr for the Rio Grande turkey.

RECORD DE LONGEVIDAD PARA INDIVIDUO SILVESTRE DE *MELEAGRIS GALLOPAVO*

Sinopsis.—Un individuo macho de *Meleagris gallopavo* encontrado muerto en el condado de Franklin, Massachusetts, tenía al menos 15 años de edad, lo que lo convierte en el récord más viejo para cualquier subespecie de pavo. Los récords previos de longevidad correspondían a 9.5 años para un pavo de Merriam y 14 para un individuo de Rio Grande.

In September 1992, a fisherman found the carcass of a leg-banded (# MDFW 145) male Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) near Gate 26 in the Quabbin Reservation, New Salem, Franklin County, Massachusetts, approx. 29 km from its release site. The carcass was decomposed but intact. I trapped and banded this turkey in Great Barrington, Berkshire County, on 15 Mar. 1979, and translocated it to the Hubbardston State Forest, Hubbardston, Worcester County, on 16 March. The turkey was aged as an adult (>1 yr) when captured, indicating a hatch year of 1977 or earlier. Assuming an arbitrary hatching date of 1 June and death not earlier than summer 1992, the turkey was at least 15 yr old at death. This makes the bird the oldest known Wild Turkey, extending the longevity record for this species by more than 1 yr and for the eastern subspecies by 2 yr and 2 mo.

Pre-telemetry studies of the Wild Turkey suggested a mean life expectancy of 1.3–1.6 yr and annual mortality rates of 52–76% (Lewis 1980, Mosby 1967). These estimates were derived from composite life table analyses based on band recoveries or hunter-killed birds, but were not age-, sex- or time-specific and contained invalid assumptions (Vangilder 1992). Annual survival rates of radio-marked turkeys in Iowa of 40–49% for males and 63–64% for females declined by 21–23% for adult males, juvenile males, and juvenile females and 6% for adult hens after the initiation of fall hunting (Little et al. 1990). Annual survival estimates from a heavily hunted area in Iowa (Jackson et al., unpubl. data, cited in Vangilder 1992: 154) using radiotelemetry and Heisey-Fuller statistical estimates indicated a mean annual survival of 0.333 for juvenile male turkeys and 0.383 for adult males.

Early reports of long-lived Wild Turkeys (Davis 1949, Mosby and Handley 1943) were anecdotal and did not involve marked birds. Banding

data (Donohoe 1990, Lewis 1980, Powell 1965) suggest that Wild Turkeys ≥ 6 yr old are scarce. Walker (unpubl. data, cited in Lewis 1967:69) reported a banded male Rio Grande turkey (*M. g. intermedia*) that survived nearly 14 yr. A banded Rio Grande hen transplanted from Texas to California survived at least 12 yr and 3 mo (Anonymous 1981). Williams and Austin (1988) reported a female Florida turkey (*M. g. osceola*) transplanted to Texas and re-trapped at 13 yr old. A banded eastern turkey (*M. g. silvestris*) of unknown sex from West Virginia (Clapp et al. 1982) was 12 yr and 6 mo old when recovered and a wing-banded eastern hen from New Jersey (Eriksen 1992) was at least 12 yr and 10 mo old when illegally shot. Ligon (1946:7) reported a male Merriam's turkey (*M. g. merriami*) in New Mexico "definitely" aged 9.5 yr. Longevity data for Gould's turkey (*M. g. mexicana*) are lacking.

Predators, including coyote (*Canis latrans*), fisher (*Mustela pennanti*), and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), are abundant in the Quabbin Reservation area and may scavenge as well as kill live prey. The carcass of turkey #145 was intact but decomposed when found (W. Brach, pers. comm.), indicating the absence of scavenging and suggesting a death not earlier than summer 1992. On the basis of this assumption, and with an arbitrary hatching date of 1 Jun. 1977, the turkey was at least 15 yr old at death. This exceeds the longevity for Wild Turkeys of any subspecies.

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OWL CONSERVATION AND BIOLOGY

Issues and actions in owl conservation and biology, a roundtable discussion with Dr. Richard J. Clark, Norman Smith, Leonard J. Soucy and Dr. Dwight G. Smith, was recorded at the September meeting of the Association of Field Ornithologists and the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. A copy of the audio tape is available for \$3.50 (US) including postage (in the US) from Dr. Valerie Freer, Science Department, Sullivan Community College, Loch Sheldrake, NY 12759.