

What happens after the breeding season?

Typically, throughout summer, fall and winter, four groups will form:

1. Hens with poults, or chicks, band together.
2. Old, brood-less hens flock together.
3. Mature gobblers, including siblings, run together in bachelors' clubs.
4. Young gobblers, or jakes, hang out together - like rowdy teenagers.³

In the case of our local turkeys, one year the Dad took off on a journey of his own and remained out of the area for over six months, returning around mid-winter. Meanwhile, Mom, her daughter and four sons remained together here in town. Might we consider this a lesson in how to keep a long-term relationship thriving?

What attracts this family of turkeys to life in La Conner?

The food is quite tasty, with friendly, caring well-wishers frequently contributing a rich diet of sunflower seeds, chicken mash and other delights to whatever else the turkeys may forage for themselves. Sleeping accommodations are upscale – there are many carports and garages on which to leap incrementally before landing on the final destination of a lofty treetop roost, all with an excellent view of the channel. At present, their favorite overnight spot is near the Gaches Mansion, home of the La Conner Quilt and Textile Museum.

As time goes by, the turkeys have developed a flair for history - frequently spending their day on the grounds of the Skagit County Historical Museum.



Photo courtesy of C. R. Batchelor © 2005

Acting in their official role as town mascots, another big bird draw is the excellent quality of window shopping – both in stores and art galleries. And, of course, there is always the lure of tiptoeing through the tulip fields.

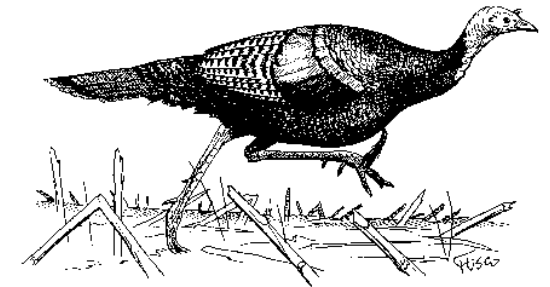


The birds enjoy the wares of a local shop

1. <http://www.wildturkeyzone.com/wildturkey/species1.htm>
2. *San Francisco Chronicle*, David Perlman, Chronicle Science Editor. Thursday, March 3, 2005
3. http://www.huntingnet.com/staticpages/staticpage_detail.aspx?id=207

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All photos courtesy of Bud Moore unless otherwise noted.

The Wild Turkeys of



La Conner



Courtesy of the

Skagit County Historical Museum



At the top of the hill in La Conner

501 South 4th St
360.466.3365

www.skagitcounty.net/museum

Open Tues - Sun 11 - 5

Talking Turkey



La Conner has its own unique family of wild turkeys. In spring of 2004 the first turkeys appeared, a male and a female, according to local resident Bud Moore. The next spring, eight chicks were born, and of those, five survived. Just before Thanksgiving 2005, Wayne Everton, mayor at the time, declared the turkeys the official town mascot, thereby saving them from any holiday dinner appearances. Multiple generations of the original family have thrived in La Conner ever since.

Anatomy of a wild turkey

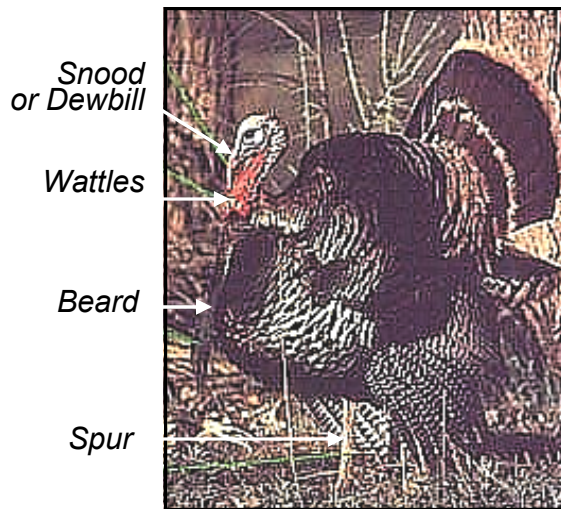


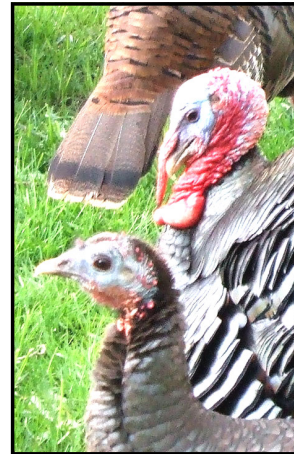
Photo courtesy of www.thewildturkeyzone.com

How does one distinguish the males from the females? Males (gobblers) have bronzy, iridescent body plumage with black-tipped breast feathers, and hens have light brown breast feather tips. The gobbler typically has a tuft of modified feathers called a “beard” protruding from its breast, along with an upwardly curving “spur” on the lower legs. A few hens will develop beards although they are typically much thinner and shorter than gobbler beards.

Jakes, or yearling gobblers, normally weigh 9 to 13 pounds and have short, rounded spurs and a beard less than 5 inches long. Older toms generally weigh between 16 and 21 pounds and have spurs longer than half an inch and a beard more than 7 inches in length. First-year hens, or jennies, typically weigh 5 to 7 pounds; adult hens average 9 pounds.¹

In spring a young turkey's fancy ...

During spring a young (as well as a not-so-young) male turkey's fancy does indeed produce a wild array of elaborate mating rituals. There is always one dominant male. However, there appears to be a somewhat altruistic streak in turkeys. The male, approaching a female in a courtship ritual with two or more of his brothers (or sons in our case), will blush brilliantly red and blue about his face and throat, fan his broad brown and white tail, lower his outspread wings and emit loud thrumming noises through his air sacks as he prances in a shuffling strut.



(l) Female & male (r) display different characteristics

And while he engages in his display, his siblings (or sons) do so too, but silently and without the strut, in a kind of cooperative semi-courtship; they also turn to ward off any hostile interlopers seeking to court the same female.



A tom struts his stuff

Ultimately, only the dominant male makes a successful union with the female, while the others never get the satisfaction. Since they are all closely related to the dominant male, what they do get, however, is some of their own genes passed on through the female to the offspring of the coupling. And that is the point of all the fuss: not necessarily a quest for love and romance, but simply a businesslike method for transmitting DNA on to future generations.²

The females, not to be outdone, engage in their own sort of spring fancy during mating season, taking dirt baths and pecking at (perhaps grooming?) the faces of the males, according to former mayor and long-time resident Bud Moore. Bud has become the town's official expert on the life and times of our local flock, or brood, of turkeys, and provided much of the “local flavor” for this brochure.

As of spring 2008 the turkey count was six toms and two hens. During the 2007 spring breeding season, eight chicks were born with just two surviving. Who can say what the current brooding season will bring? Young turkey chicks face a number of predators, including the recent arrival of two eagles nesting nearby.