



SHOW-ME GOBBLER

A Tri-Annual Publication of the George C. Clark Missouri Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation

Volume 41 Number 1 • Spring/Summer 20

Bennett Receives National Award from NWTF

NASHVILLE, TN — Pete Muller

R.L. Bennett's devotion to providing outdoor opportunities to individuals with mobility impairments and special needs earned him the Wheelin' Sportsmen Volunteer of the Year Award from the National Wild Turkey Federation.

"I feel very humbled and honored to now be in the ranks of the great volunteers for the NWTF that have been recognized and honored in the past," Bennett said. "I hope I can continue to work and serve our Wheelin' Sportsmen, to bring joy and smiles to their faces, as they too enjoy our great outdoors."

Bennett, of Nixa, Missouri, accepted the Wheelin' Sportsmen Volunteer of the Year Award during the 43rd annual NWTF Convention and Sport Show. Mossy Oak is the official convention sponsor.

Bennett has worked tirelessly in promoting outreach events throughout his nearly 25 years of volunteer service to the NWTF. He's had a hand in the coordination of the annual Day at the Range event at Bois D'Arc Conservation



Area, an event that usually welcomes more than 250 handicapped individuals for a day of outdoor activities.

An annual deer hunt for those with mobility impairments, also hosted at Bois D'Arc CA, has benefitted from Bennett's efforts as well. He works with fellow committee members to scout the property, place blinds and recruit mentors, all in an effort to provide the hunters a most enjoyable experience.

"R.L. is committed to the NWTF's Save the Habitat. Save the Hunt. initiative, dedicating his time and efforts to the Wheelin' Sportsmen program," NWTF CEO Becky Humphries said. "Without his, and countless other volunteers' devotion, many would not get to enjoy our great outdoors."

The NWTF Wheelin' Sportsmen program provides all people with disabilities opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. NWTF chapters host Wheelin' Sportsmen events across North America to help participants gain a sense of independence by learning to stay active in the outdoors on their own.

Management of Brood Rearing Habitat to Bolster Turkey Production

By Justin Ferguson, NWTF Project Forester

Wild turkeys in Missouri were once thought of as a specialist species, limited to remote, big-timber habitats in the Ozarks. To the surprise of many, the restoration of the wild turkey in Missouri took off like a prairie fire, particularly in northern portions of the state that many considered insufficient habitat at the time. This demonstrated that wild turkey are habitat generalists, able to adapt to and survive in many different habitat types. Once turkeys reach adulthood, they become resilient creatures. Young turkeys are a different story altogether. Once hatched, a wild turkey poult can be thought of as a specialist, with a very narrow set of requirements for survival. These requirements are access to food in the form of insects and cover to hide from predators. These simple requirements are becoming harder for the poults to come by.

Much has changed on the landscape between the early days of wild turkey restoration, the peak population in the early 2000's, and now. Turkey populations have declined due to a slew of factors. Issues such as increased predator populations, land conversion, and wet springs have all contributed to the larger, overarching issue of reduced survival of turkey poults. As a species, turkeys have a high

reproductive potential and production drives turkey populations across the state. Over the previous 4 years, Missouri has experienced historic lows in our poult-hen ratio, derived from our annual brood surveys. A hen's access to quality brooding habitat, a place to take her young that satisfies their need for bugs and cover, has also diminished across the state.

The good news is that land managers can take steps to improve the brooding habitat on the properties they manage. Both forests and open-lands can be managed in ways to promote a hen's ability to raise young. Good brooding habitat must offer several key components. Abundance of insects is important. Poults require a diet of protein rich insects to facilitate rapid growth. Access to abundant food allows sufficient nutrition and growth rates to rapidly achieve flight. A poult's flightless period is the most critical time of their life in terms of survival. Once turkey poults can roost off the ground, their chances of survival increase dramatically and how quickly they get to this stage is entirely dependent upon insect densities. Another key component is cover. The cover available should be tall enough to provide overhead cover for the poults, but not too tall to limit the hen's vision. Overhead cover is especially important to protect poults from avian predators.



Can you see the poults? Neither can predators. Photo credit: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Poults also need the vegetative structure that allows them to easily maneuver through the stand in their search for insects. Dense stands of cool season grass, like mature stands of fescue, do not provide this. Access to quality brooding habitat can help mitigate poult losses to predation, wet weather, and other factors.

Forestland managers have a couple of key tools available to improve the brooding habitat on their property: chainsaw and drip torch. The vast majority of forestland I encounter as a forester is overstocked with trees and features a closed canopy. A mature, closed canopied forest does provide hard mast during the winter, roosting, and loafing habitat. However, it does

Continued on page 3.

From The President

By Dan Zerr

Greetings To All.

I hope that this finds everyone safe and healthy. A lot of things have changed at the Missouri State Chapter and NWTf as well. I am sure you can understand this as your lives have been turned upside down as well. Hopefully we are on the verge of returning to a “normal” normal, as we get ready to re-boot our lives and activities.

This was a great spring turkey season as evidenced by the increase in permit sales. It looks like a lot of people took to sheltering at home in the turkey woods. It was good to clear our minds of anxiety and good for the soul. I took this opportunity to take stock of our hard work for the NWTf, at our local level (thanks to all the chapters that had a chance to conduct their banquets before the shut down) and still maintain my ongoing personal conservation of the wild turkey; much to my chagrin. To those who had your banquets postponed, it looks like things are getting ready to roll again. As we get ready to gear up again, it is essential to rekindle the spirit and drive that made each of our events successful. Reach out to our hard working staff members in the state, and let them know that you are ready. If the state chapter, or any board member on the state chapter can be of assistance don't be afraid to call. We are willing and able to help in any way we can.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is in the middle of drafting a turkey management plan to replace the previous harvest management plan that has been in place since 1996. The plan was open for public comment throughout the month of June. The format of the plan was more strategic in nature and covers everything from habitat and harvest management to research and outreach. The state board did weigh in on this plan and we trust that MDC will do the right thing to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the resource. We were also thrilled to hear that the next phase of turkey research in NEMO was approved into the Departments budget. This next 5 year study will take a detailed look at what specifically are the problems causing alarmingly low poult survival. These findings will hopefully help us more effectively address the turkey decline. The state boards commitment to contribute 25k each year with an additional 35k in total provided by the NWTf foundation was what helped get this across the finish line. Know that your hard work and dedication are appreciated. Take time to let those around you know how much they mean to you. Let's stop, take a breath and enjoy what we have accomplished. As we continue, we can't do it without you, together we can continue our great conservation work.

*Thanks For All You Do,
Dan*



Project Forester Tyler Cooper and his girlfriend Marissa Zeibarth. This was Marissa's first turkey.

Please consider sharing your story in the Show Me Gobbler Publication
No upcoming summer issue. Next deadline is November 30th.



NWTf

Conserve. Hunt. Share.

SHOW-ME GOBBLER

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ARTICLE SUBMISSION NOTE:

The staff of the Show-Me Gobbler thank you for your contributions to the publication. Please feel free to submit future articles with photos to the contact information listed above. Submission requirements: Digital copy submitted in Microsoft Word. (please contact us if you can only send hard copy) Digital photographs only. Please use at least 225 resolution (dpi), or medium to high settings from your phone. Photos submitted outside of these guidelines may not be suitable for printing. Please include photo captions and credits for each photo submitted. Thanks again for your contributions and we look forward to your participation in the future.

How has COVID-19 Impacted the NWTF?

By District Biologist John Burk

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a set of circumstances our state/nation/planet has never dealt with before and impacted every facet of our lives. As a nation, we have experienced other pandemics and national emergencies but nothing has altered lives at the scale of this pandemic. Whatever your opinion of the government policies put in place or how they have personally affected you, we are all having to deal with the impacts of these decisions. Some of you may be wondering how this situation has impacted the NWTF.

Prior to the shutdown orders enacted in mid-March, the NWTF, in general, and, Missouri specifically, were halfway through our 2020 fiscal year in really good financial shape; fundraising was up, membership was up, and things were looking good that we would meet or exceed our budget.

The shutdown occurred during our historically strongest fundraising months (February-April), and everything came to a screeching halt. We have great leadership who saw what was coming as soon as the threat of a pandemic was announced. When congress announced its intension to provide paycheck protection plan (PPP) funding, staff worked around the clock to first ensure nongovernmental organizations could qualify. They

then dug through the paper mountain required to successfully apply. At the time we received the PPP funding, we were hopeful we would be having banquets prior to exhausting those funds, which did not turn out to be the case. The following is a list of other steps we took to help us get through this:

- All staff are minimizing operating expenses.
- Conservation Programs has invoiced for work completed and have even been able to bill for advanced payment on work that will be completed.
- Development staff have been stepping up the pace with major donor opportunities.
- All staff have been submitting ideas for alternative sources of fundraising and have created a variety of online options.
- 51 staff members had to be let go at the end of June.
- Remaining staff took pay cuts and reduced benefits.

What does the future look like? That is the million-dollar question, and this thing, from the start, has been a fast-moving target that seems to change course daily. The safety and health of our

staff and volunteers come first, so the guidance from headquarters is we will reengage based upon the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control in addition to any local restrictions. Whatever that ends up looking like, it is certainly going to be different from how we might have operated in the past. We will get through this with your help, understanding and support. Here are some things to consider that will really help the NWTF out:

- 1) Ask your friends to become members of the NWTF.
- 2) Attend NWTF events in your area to show your support.
- 3) Share our mission with your friends and family and direct them to our website to join.
- 4) Encourage others to participate in our fundraising efforts and/or membership drives.
- 5) Share online membership drives and other fundraisers when they are posted on social media, like our “Call For All” campaign at: <https://your.nwtf.org/call-for-all/>.

Thank you, sincerely, for your past, present, and future support!

Management of Brood... continued from page 1.

not provide the necessary vegetative structure to qualify as nesting and brooding habitat and this is where the bottleneck for turkey population growth exists. Bug densities are much lower in closed canopy forests. Additionally, closed canopy forests offer very little cover at ground level for poults and offer an abundance of perching trees for avian predators. It is easy to see how this kind of habitat sets broods up for failure. Forests can be made more productive with pre-commercial thinning practices, Forest Stand Improvement (FSI) for instance. FSI puts holes in the canopy that allow light to the forest floor. In the short term, this promotes the growth of herbaceous plants that attract insects and provide cover. Residual trees from the FSI will have expanded growing space and will grow and produce mast at accelerated rates as well. Over time, however, woody regeneration will eventually outcompete herbaceous vegetation. Prescribed fire can be used to temporarily knock back woody

regeneration in order to promote herbaceous cover. Commercial timber harvest under the right circumstances can be used to open the canopy and allow light to the forest floor. Care should be taken when planning a timber harvest to protect the habitat and economic resources that forestland provides. It is best to consult a resource professional, such as a Forester or Private Lands Conservationist, prior to conducting a harvest.

A very large percentage of our forestlands historically would have been classified as open woodland communities. An open woodland features a much lower stocking of trees and an open canopy, compared to a true forest. This open condition was maintained by frequent fire and allowed for the growth of abundant grasses and forbs. Since fire has essentially been removed from the landscape, these communities have matured into overstocked, closed canopy forests providing poor brooding habitat. On appropriate sites,

land managers can rapidly restore open woodland communities with a thinning treatment, followed by the reimplementation of repeated fire. Often fire implemented on a return interval of 3-5 years is sufficient for woodland management, following a more frequent fire interval during the initial restoration phase. Woodland communities offer hens exceptional brooding habitat. Diverse forbs and grasses attract insects while providing good cover for the hen and her brood. Managing forested lands as open woodlands, where appropriate, is likely the most impactful step a land manager can take to benefit their local turkey population. Woodland communities offer benefits to other wildlife, providing year round food to deer for example.

Land managers similarly have options for open-lands. Keeping in mind the insect and cover requirements of broods, some open-lands are not as attractive or beneficial as others. Short turf forming cool season grasses like fescue do not

provide the overhead cover that poults require and do not attract an abundance of bugs. Fields with a diverse mix of warm season forbs and grasses are much more attractive to insects, while also providing the cover requirements needed to hide broods from danger. Often, it is not possible to convert large fields from cool season grasses to native warm season grasses and forbs, due to economic factors. However, land managers could consider establishing a buffer strip of native warm season grasses and forbs around larger fields in these instances. Certain food plot species, notably red, crimson and ladino clovers can provide insect attraction. However, food plots often lack the cover to protect poults. With this in mind, clover plots provide benefits over cool season grass fields, but do not provide all the benefits that Mother Nature has provided with native warm season species or early successional habitats. Food plots are not a substitute for native habitat, but deserve a place

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Turkey Population Concerns

By District Biologist John Burk

Which comes first, the gobbler, or the poult?

As you are reading this, the 2020 Missouri spring turkey season is not far off in the year-view mirror. Regardless of where you fall on your assessment of how your individual turkey season went, it is probably safe to say that we are ALL very concerned that we're not hearing as many as we did in the past. It is probably also safe to say that we ALL would like this trajectory changed and desperately want something done about it. In the 2019 summer edition, I wrote an article on this same topic where I listed and explained a variety of limiting factors impacting our turkey population, addressed why the real solution(s) will not be of regulatory origin, and what actually is being done to address the situation. Therefore, I am not going to go into great detail, here, rehashing those same points. Suffice it to say that your National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) do sincerely and deeply care and we ARE doing what we can to address the situation. As someone who has an unquenchable thirst for the turkey hunting experience and has spent their entire career working with the wild turkey resource in 4 states, it personally pains me when it is suggested that NWTF is not doing enough or that MDC is not listening and does not seem to care. If there was a simple fix, it would be fixed. If regulations changes would take us back to the populations of the early 2000's they'd already be in place.

As you read this you are probably still skeptical about regulatory solutions not being THE solution. The most common suggestions that are now borderline demands include: no legal hen harvest, go back to one bird and a 2 week season in the spring. These options are often the first to be offered up because, they seem like they would make a difference to those demanding them. "We MUST be killing too many hens in the fall and even if we're

not, every extra hen HAS to make a difference! Everyone else must be killing 2 birds in the spring and they're out their every damn day trying to get it done." The truth is that comparatively speaking, NO ONE is fall turkey hunting anymore and the production from the hens that are taken would not make a difference at the population scale. That is a fact and the emotional response to this fact will not change it. Also, the number of folks that shoot both birds in the spring has never been more than 5%, and the vast majority of the harvest occurs the first 2 weeks. Therefore, these suggestions are offered up because they would personally impact, statistically, very few people. It's really easy to offer up a sacrifice that someone else has to make. The best available science tells us that these changes would not influence turkey population growth at all. For those folks that think we are shooting too many gobblers (I don't think that we are) I can make a suggestion that would definitely save a few long beards. Should we propose illegalizing the use of blinds, decoys, and fanning? You'd definitely carry over a few more gobblers if everyone had to call them all in and couldn't rely upon, what has become, standard operating procedure for spring turkey hunting. I also doubt that this would be supported because many have evolved to prefer the advances in regulations to garner an advantage when in pursuit of our greatest game bird. I am not advocating for these changes, but I am trying to make a point. My opinion, based upon science, is that our primary problem with the turkey decline is not harvest related, especially in southern Missouri.

However, I offer the following suggestion that a split season may be worth looking into. A lot of the recent data, particularly out of the southeast, suggests that early seasons could be detrimental. The theory goes that if you are hunting birds prior to the onset of peak breeding you could be directly interfering with and delaying the breeding cycle. Turkeys breed in what is known as an exploded leek strategy. Dominant hens seek out dominant gobblers and hens are bred from top to bottom through

the pecking order. If the dominant gobbler is removed prior to all of the hens being bred, that entire local population reshuffles and the process starts over again. This can delay nesting and incubation and cause that whole process to be strung out. The way that this can influence poult survival is that "predator swamping" does not really occur. In other words, when all of the hens are sitting within 2 or 3 weeks, then all of the nests will be hatching and the poults will be developing within a 2 or 3 week period a month later. We can see a snippet of what this looks like during periodic cicada hatches. Turkeys eat cicadas and so do most of the things that eat turkeys. The predators "are swamped" with food so a higher percentage of the prey survives.



In the past, when most states were experiencing exponential growth of both turkey populations and turkey hunters, political pressure was put on state agencies to move their seasons earlier and earlier. Here in Missouri we have the luxury of managing our natural resources based upon the best available science. We have been able to do this because the majority of the voting public constitutionally and wisely bequeathed the authority to make these decisions to MDC insulating the process from emotional responses and legislative influence. However, MDC also strives to make outdoor recreational opportunity as simple and affordable as possible. Our license fees and regulations, comparatively speaking, are among the most affordable and least cumbersome. This being said, the start of our turkey season is the third Monday in April. This date coincides with what 10 years of telemetry research data in SEMO identified as the 10 year mean date of peak incubation initiation. By timing the season this way, peak breeding is complete well before the season even opens and every hen has already been bred and is fertile. However, 2 studies in NEMO, one 10-year in

the 80's and another 5-year that just completed, identified peak incubation initiation in that region as May 4th. The reason the third Monday was chosen was to keep the regulations uniform and simple but also be as conservative as possible in the half of the state with lower turkey densities. We have experienced turkey declines state-wide but the greatest declines have occurred in north Missouri. If we are to consider modifying harvest regulations, maybe it is time to consider a split season? This would not address the overall decline because it is occurring due to an accumulation of other reasons not related to harvest. However, moving the north Missouri season back may help some. A suggestion may be to divide the state by the river. If you are



south of the river; nothing changes. If you are north of the river; your season starts on the first Monday in May. To keep everything else the same (individual populations are still only exposed to a 3 week season and no change in hunting pressure) this would also require a sacrifice by all. There would be 2 sets of tags (south zone and north zone). Hunters would have to make a south zone/north zone choice and could not buy one of each. This would mean that the Missouri turkey season would be 5 weeks long with a one week overlap and every Missouri turkey hunter would lose access to half of the state. If you still think there is a meaningful regulatory solution to the problem I have just outlined a few suggestions. If "WE" want to make a difference with regulations, let's all contribute. Asking the handful of folks that are fall turkey hunting or taking two birds in the spring to make a meaningless sacrifice to make everyone else "feel" better is not going to solve anything and is counter to our mission. The suggested regulatory changes are mine and do not represent the position of the NWTF.

The George C. Clark Missouri State Chapter Member Harvest Page

Share your outdoor experiences with your NWTF peers, PLEASE submit them to John Burk at jb Burk@nwtf.net with a brief photo description and they will be considered for the harvest page section of your Show Me Gobbler newsletter.



Cayden Dunn from Sullivan County, MO took this bird this youth season with 1 inch spurs, and double beard, the longest beard 10 inches, weighing 24 lbs .



Anthony Greco Age 14 Jackson County



Peyton Breeden - Pulaski County



Lori Jones with Mountain Grove Missouri's, David Blanton Memorial Chapter and her Kansas Gobbler.



Left is Lane Pollard Age 9 and Right is Kale Pollard Age 10. These brothers doubled down on a pair of Longbeards opening morning! They are the to sons of board member Jason Pollard.



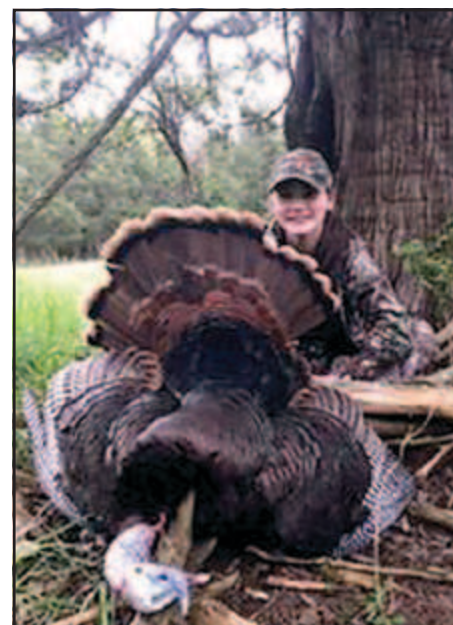
Talon McCoy of Leonard, MO Salt River Sharp Spurs jakes member knocked down an opening morning gobbler. He was accompanied by his father Ryan McCoy.



Henry Drane harvested his first gobbler at 80 years young with a compound bow.



10 year old Taylor Martin from Maries County harvested their first turkey on 4/4/2020.



Congratulations to Lauryn Cosgrove from Ripley County.



Carter Pondrom from Pulaski County and his heavy bearded tom.



Hayden Drake of Cass County.



Liam Rasmussen got his 2 birds this season guided by 4 Rivers Chapter member, past state board member, longtime supporters AND grampa, Eldo Meyer.



Hayden Hawkins with his impressive Trippl Bearded Gobbler.



Conner Quinn and his Chariton County bird.



Member Jameson Drew with a fine Caldwell County Gobbler.



Tatum Kennedy of Andrew County.



Congratulations to Trenten Schreiner.



Board Member John Shene and Member Jim Drew Opening Day Harvest in Caldwell County.



R.J. Peace and their Pulaski County bird.



Congratulation to Joshua Willams. His turkey was harvested in St. Genevie, Mo.



Jamie Laughlin, age 11, from Pulaski county. Just a jake this year but glad to have the opportunity.



Ethan Starne, age 12, from Vernon County. 1st harvested bird of 22lbs, with a 9.5" beard.



Congratulations to Micah Daniels from Pike County on his second turkey.



Secretary, Graydon Gaines, of the Kirksville Ridge Runners NWTF Chapter from Adair county. 23.88 lbs, 12" beard, 1 1/4" spurs.



Brayden Grant harvested this 23 lbs, 1 1/8" spurs, 10 1/2 inch beard. This is his 7th gobbler and his 8th bird since 2014.



Maci Steuber from Maries County on her last youth hunt, but definitely not her first bird.



Spencer Estes proudly showing of his 2020 Spring harvest.



Harper VanZee 9yrs Old 1st Turkey.



John Chesnut with a beautiful spring bird.



Congratulations to Gaven Schreiner.



A proud moment for Lane Harrison this year.



RD Larry Neal did his part to mentor this year guiding Jake Burns to his first 2, and Wyatt Balcer and Zach Arnold to their firsts.



NWTF Project Forester, Justin Ferguson, with a paddlefish he snagged in St. Louis and his IL turkey. Way to go Justin



Jace is 6 and his bird was 26lbs., had 2 beards, and 1.5" spurs.



Lisa Beumer (L) and Gracie Masters (R) of Walt Beumer Memorial Chapter with her first gobbler taken in Grafton IL.



The Keathley brothers took birds during the youth season guided by Kingdom of Callaway Limbhangers father and son dynamic duo Don and Brant Masek.



Lisa Beumer North Dakota longbeard taken after a long army crawl!



Larry Edwards with one of his North Dakota gobblers.



Lisa Beumer - Ozark Mountain triple bearded gobbler.



Lisa Beumer with Woodward Oklahoma Rio longbeard.



Look at that smile of the face of Roper Niemeier. Way to go Roper!

It Isn't Only The Turkeys That Are Experiencing Difficulties

By NFI Forester Tyler Cooper

These past few years have been full of highs and lows weather-wise, and mainly highs! Record temperatures during drought years as well as record amounts of rainfall in the wet years. In the past 5 years we've had both! With these record years we've also seen a record amount of tree mortality and disease in our Missouri forests and woodlands. This is nothing to be particularly alarmed about, but there are some signs and symptoms to be on the lookout for.

Two of the culprits are diseases called Anthracnose and another called Hypoxylon which impact trees in opposite extremes. Anthracnose is caused by a fungus which typically occurs in wet or extreme wet years. Anthracnose affects many species of deciduous trees and shrubs. Shade trees such as ash, maple, oak, and sycamore are commonly damaged. This disease rarely causes death but causes defoliation. More times than not after a wet spell ceases the fungus will dry out and trees will often leaf back out. With years like 2019 these trees were almost never in a dry period and the original defoliation left them bare during the entire growing season. This really becomes an issue when there are back to back years of above average rainfall and the trees have multiple years of defoliation; this is when mortality occurs. Some things that can help reduce the intensity of the outbreak are as follows: Pruning to improve air flow through the canopy may help reduce anthracnose infection. Removing fallen leaves may also help to reduce future infections. Treatment for anthracnose is



Anthracnose on a pin oak. Although hard to see in this black and white photo., watch for groupings of dead foliage.

generally not necessary but may be warranted on trees that have been defoliated several years in a row. Fungicides are preventative and must be applied before symptoms appear applying full coverage of buds and twigs to be effective. Fungicides containing propiconazole, thiophanate methyl, copper, mancozeb, or chlorothalonil listed as the active ingredient are typically best.

Hypoxylon is the opposite and more prevalent during dry years such as 2018. This disease also arises from the presence of a fungus but is much more deadly than Anthracnose. If the Hypoxylon canker is visually present on the tree it will not survive. It mainly affects the red oak groups but can affect most hardwoods. This canker affects the sapwood which moves water from the soil to the leaf and ultimately suffocates the tree. Vigorous, healthy trees are colonized by the fungus, but only damaged or stressed trees develop cankers and are killed. Outbreaks of this disease follow severe drought.



Hypoxylon canker on a Northern red oak.

Healthy trees are often already colonized by the Hypoxylon fungus, so removing infected trees may not protect nearby trees.

Whatever your position on climate change, man made catastrophe or just the cyclical nature of climate and weather, it is a fact that we have been experiencing more extreme weather over the last decade or so. These extremes have consequences and as managers and land stewards we will make the adjustments necessary to maximize our effectiveness.

Missouri Hunting Heritage Banquets

Finley River Chapter

07/18/2020 - 5:00 PM

Contact: Scharlene Hughes - (417) 581-7863

Location: Christian County ELKS

2400 N 18th Street, Ozark, MO 65721

Marais-Des Cygnes Trap Shoot

07/25/2020 - 1:00 PM

Location: Settles Ford Gun Club

37111 E 360 1st Street, Garden City, MO 64747

NWTF Digital Gun Bash

08/31/2020

Contact: Carl Nate - (816) 517-6751

Location: Online

Osage Gobblers

03/26/2021 - 5:30 PM

Contact: Patrick Kliethermes - (573) 690-6005

Location: Osage Community Center

1769 US 50, Linn, MO 65061

Marais-des Cygnes River Gobblers

03/27/2021 - 5:30 PM

Contact: Wyatt Jackson - (816) 289-0578

Location: Whiskey Mansion Ranch

2109 NW County RD 2501, Butler, MO 64720

Muddy Creek Gobblers

04/16/2021 - 6:00 PM

Contact: Jared Chestnut - (417) 262-0531

Location: Thiebaud Auditorium

11th and Poplar, Lamar, MO 64759

Check www.nwtf.org/events for more banquets as they become available.

Wild Turkey Restoration in Missouri: Where Are We Now?

By Reina M. Tyl
Resource Scientist
Missouri Department of Conservation

The wild turkey is one of the most important game species in Missouri and a cherished natural resource. Missouri is home to the eastern subspecies of turkey. Each year, more than 100,000 hunters pursue this species, generating considerable revenue for the state's economy. Missouri has one of the largest turkey populations in the nation and annual turkey harvests in Missouri are also among the highest in the country.

Historically, turkeys were abundant throughout the state, except in the prairies of western and northwestern Missouri, with numbers estimated to be between 250,000–400,000 birds. However, the species was quickly brought to the brink of extirpation following European settlement due to unregulated harvest and habitat loss.

Beginning in the mid-1920s, the Missouri Fish and Game Department began releasing pen-reared or game-farm turkeys in an attempt to increase wild populations. This practice ended in the early 1940s after failing to curb the population decline. The hunting season for turkeys was closed in 1938. Shortly thereafter, in the 1940s, the Caney Mountain Refuge in southwest Missouri was purchased as an experimental turkey management area. Through intensive habitat management, the turkey population began to grow. Although early results on the Caney Mountain Refuge were encouraging, results of turkey population surveys in the early 1950s estimated there were fewer than 2,500 turkeys in only 14 Missouri counties.

After release of pen-reared birds failed, it was evident that the only solution for restoring turkey populations was to capture and relocate wild-captured birds into areas with suitable habitat. To increase numbers of wild birds and provide a source population for relocations, in the early 1950s MDC began intensively managing five refuges in the southern Ozarks where a few turkeys existed. One of these areas was Peck Ranch where intensive management efforts resulted in an increase in turkey numbers from 9 birds in 1954 to 100 birds in 1957.

Although the experience on Peck Ranch showed that turkey populations could be increased with habitat management and protection from harvest, an efficient method of capturing turkeys needed to be developed to allow for initiation of a trap-and-transfer program. In 1953, this was accomplished by modifying the cannon net trap, which was originally developed for capturing

geese. With this tool, biologists were for the first time able to capture large groups of turkeys in an efficient manner.

With a means of capturing turkeys developed, finding suitable release sites became the next hurdle. After communities submitted a restocking request, biologists evaluated suitability of turkey habitat on their properties. At that time, optimal habitat was believed to be a ratio of 70% forest and 30% open lands over a minimum of 15,000 acres. Because of the large area required for a turkey release, citizens within the restocking area had to agree to protect—not harvest—the birds while populations were becoming established.

Although MDC's turkey restoration effort began in earnest in 1954, it was the success of a private land release in Ste. Genevieve county in 1960 that accelerated restocking efforts. Following this release, requests from the public began pouring in as interested communities wanted turkeys released in their area. Initially, restoration efforts were focused in southern Missouri based on thinking at the time that turkeys would only persist in areas with substantial forest cover. However, during the early 1960s, a successful release of turkeys in Adair County, which had less than 20% forest cover, changed biologists' views of turkey habitat requirements. Because of the Adair County success, turkeys began being released throughout northern and western Missouri.

When Missouri's turkey restoration efforts were completed in the late 1970s, over 2,600 turkeys had been translocated to over 200 sites in 91 counties. The restoration effort resulted in establishing turkey populations in all counties of the state and is considered by many to be one of the greatest success stories in wildlife management history.

After the restoration efforts were complete, turkey populations continued to grow almost exponentially during the 1980s and 1990s as populations expanded into unoccupied habitats throughout the state. However, as the landscape became saturated with turkeys, population growth began to slow down. Missouri's turkey population peaked during the early 2000s. This peak was followed by a few years of poor production in the late 2000s, which led to statewide population declines. Production improved during the early 2010s which led to increased turkey populations in many areas; however, starting in 2016, turkey production once again took a turn for the worse.

The abundance trends of Missouri's turkey population are typical of restored wildlife populations. Immediately following population

restoration efforts while turkey densities are low, we expect to see rapidly rising abundance. Eventually, the number of turkeys on the landscape will exceed the number of turkeys that the landscape can sustain, and turkey numbers will decline. After a period of decline, we expect that the number of turkeys on the landscape will fluctuate around a lower-level of abundance than what was observed right before the decline (i.e., a lower abundance than peak abundance). Moving forward, fluctuations in turkey numbers of considerable magnitude will be normal and can be expected.

This trend in turkey numbers is not unique to Missouri. Across the Midwest, many states whose turkey populations were extirpated by the early 1900s have restored their turkey populations. Those states are observing similar trends in turkey populations as what has been observed here in Missouri. Many Midwestern states hit their peak turkey numbers in the mid-to-late 2000s and are either currently experiencing a period of decline or are beginning to see their turkey population fluctuate in recent years.

In addition to being influenced by where we are at in the timeline of Missouri's turkey restoration history, the number of turkeys on the landscape today has also been impacted by production the last few years. While turkey production has been exhibiting a downward trend for a couple of decades, production the past few years has been especially poor.

Since turkey abundance appears to be correlate well with turkey production, we can expect turkey number to increase considerably following a few years of improved production. For example, after a period of poor production in the late 2000s led to statewide population declines, all it took was a few years with poult-to-hen ratios around 1.5 poults per hen to see turkey abundance rebound.

The best thing a landowner can do to help the turkey population is improving nesting and brood-rearing habitat on their property. In general, this type of cover consists of a mixture of grasses and other herbaceous plants that is about knee-high. Planting native warm season grasses in open areas and thinning woodlands are great ways to establish this type of cover. If you have specific questions about how to improve turkey habitat on your property, contact your local Private Land Conservationist (PLC). You can find contact information for the PLC in your county at mdc.mo.gov/regional-contacts.



Cameron Vogt age 12 first turkey. Ste Genevieve, MO. Grandpa Stan Schwent, River Hills Thundering Longbeards, 15lbs 4" beard, nub spurs.



Matthew Allcock age 11, second turkey. Cape Girardeau, MO. Grandpa Tim, Schwent, Bootheel Boss Gobblers, 23lbs, 10" beard, 1" spurs.



Tim Schwent, from Jackson, MO. Bootheel Boss Gobblers, 19lbs, 10.5" beard 1" spurs.



Don Masek is a committee member of the Kingdom of Callaway Limbhangers.



Darren Jones with a dandy of a buck taken in 2019 rifle season.



Ethan Phillips, son of Mike Phillips shown with his bird taken during the youth season in Carroll County. His scale showed 26#, but dad carved the bird up before official measurements were taken with witnesses.



Dean Bauman with his MO bird.



Jace Brody is 6 and his bird was 26lbs. had 2 beards and spurs at 1-and-half".



Isabel Murphy is the daughter of John a Kirksville Ridge Runners member.

Super Fund at work in Northeast Missouri

Monroe City High School FFA shooting team requested funds to purchase a clay thrower. The NWTF, Monroe City Whitetail, and Quail Forever Group made the donation to purchase the thrower. NWTF Dan Minor, Steve St.Clair, Daryl Caldwell, Bruce Mills and Bob Kendrick. Monroe City White Tail Bob Kendrick and Todd Shoemate. Quail Forever Group Bob Riley, Nick Sean, FFA Teacher, Sean Frankenbach, Monroe City Student Spencer Fuller, Landon Shinn, and Mathew Barnes.



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Advertising & Article Deadlines for the Show Me Gobbler Publication
Next Deadline = November 30

Time Well Spent

By Glen Boyer

It was the second day of the season and a perfect morning to hunt, sunshine and mild temperatures. A blind had been set between two large areas of mature forest so access to the area could be made without walking a long distance. Although it was a morning that promised a lot of gobbling, there were only a few. They were at a distance and didn't answer our calls.

We called conservatively for the next two hours with some hens coming through and a trio of jakes that were spooked at seventy-five yards. We did have an albino blue jay that stayed in front of us for a few minutes, but it didn't qualify as a turkey.

As time was running out and we said two or three times "just twenty more minutes", we decided to be aggressive with more calling and more gobbles since we were in a blind. No answers. Ten more minutes and we're done. And then we see a gobbler sneaking in from the side. Darrell took position and the gobbler raised his head to find us. Game over, resulting in two proud hunters, one of whom was 95 years old.



Darrell Cope – Born May 31, 1925. Turkey taken in Wright County on private land at 11:00 a.m. April 21, 2020.

Management of Brood... continued from page 3.

in the landowner's toolbox, especially when escape cover is provided nearby.

As a forester, working with private landowners in Southeast Missouri, I have seen quite a few instances of increasing local turkey populations directly correlated with management practices mentioned earlier. While land managers cannot control some factors like the weather and individually reduce predator populations in a meaningful way, they have the opportunity to positively influence turkey populations with habitat management. With management of habitats to provide sufficient brooding habitat, we can allow turkeys to utilize their high reproductive potential as a species, in order to raise and retain more turkeys on the landscape.

Landowners in Missouri are fortunate to have great opportunities available for technical forestry and wildlife habitat assistance. Private landowners can find assistance in management by contacting their NWTF Foresters, local Missouri Department of Conservation Private Lands Conservationist, or the Natural Resources Conservation Service office for their county. Below are helpful links to locate technical assistance in your area:

NWTF State Contacts:
<https://www.nwtf.org/about/state/missouri>

MDC Local Contacts:
<https://mdc.mo.gov/regional-contactsNRCS> Field Office

Locator: <https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?service=page/CountyMap&state=MO&stateName=Missouri&stateCode=29>