

**Alberta Conservation Association**  
**2023/24 Project Summary Report**

**Project Name:** Turkey Surveys and Population Augmentation

**Wildlife Program Manager:** Doug Manzer

**Project Leader:** Mike Verhage

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**Partnerships**

Calgary Fish & Game Association

City of Kimberley

Government of Alberta

Government of British Columbia

Landholders in southwestern Alberta

Lethbridge Fish & Game Association

Okotoks & District Fish & Game Association

Onoway & District Fish & Game Association

Safari Club International – Calgary Chapter

Sarcee Fish & Game Association

Tony and Karen Legault (Paradise Hill Farm)

Wildwood and District Rod & Gun Club

Windermere Village

Zone 1 – Southern Alberta Fish & Game Society

Zone 5 – Northeastern Alberta Fish & Game Association

## **Key Findings**

- We contacted landowners across known wild turkey range to gather winter counts. The numbers have been tracking down with an aggregate count of 840 in 2021, 792 in 2022, and then down to 637 birds in 2023.
- We translocated 177 wild turkeys from southeastern British Columbia into southwestern Alberta in early 2023. They were considered problem birds in British Columbia and captured around towns and communities. The birds were released in eight locations to jump-start sub-populations.
- We conducted an annual volunteer summer brood survey that, in 2023, had 30 respondents return a count of 175 hens with 243 poults for a ratio of 1.39 poults per hen. A ratio above 2:1 is considered a threshold for a stable wild turkey population.
- We translocated birds from British Columbia again in early 2024, and in total, we released 183 into southwestern Alberta.
- We tested all captured wild turkeys that are destined for release in Alberta for disease. To date, all have come back negative.

## **Details**

Wild turkeys were first translocated into Alberta in 1962 with 21 birds from South Dakota released in the Cypress Hills in the southeast corner of Alberta (GOA 2022). Since then, several introductions and relocations have occurred through southern Alberta with a hunting season initiated in the spring of 1991. The current population appears to be struggling, and this has led to the initiation of a wild bird translocation program beginning in early 2023.

We reached out to landowners in 2021 to monitor wild turkeys across their range in southwest Alberta. We divided the anticipated range into five zones and contacted ten or more landholders from each zone, primarily with ranching operations. We spoke with 118 landowners in winter 2021, and of these 44 reported an aggregate count of 840 turkeys. Many suggested that turkeys were more common in previous years, while in 2021 they were no longer present or occurred at sparse numbers. This count was 792 in 2022, and then down to 637 birds in 2023. We do not

know if this count is accurate, though we suspect it is a reasonable index and that a negative trend has been occurring across much of southwestern Alberta.

To gain more resolution with population trend we also initiated a poult survey in summer 2021. We requested the public to report counts of poults and hens in summer and early fall. Our sample sizes are low and therefore to be interpreted cautiously. Even so, the ratio of poults per hen over the three years suggesting recruitment has been low during this period (poults:hen – 1.55:1 in 2021, n=17; 0.97:1 in 2022, n=23; and 1.39:1 in 2023, n=30). A ratio above two poults per hen (i.e., 2:1) is considered the threshold for a stable population for wild turkeys.

We began translocating wild turkeys from British Columbia into southwestern Alberta to counteract the apparent population decline. In early 2023, we translocated 177 birds and released them at eight sites, and in early 2024, we translocated 183 birds and released them at 11 sites. We foresee the need to continue annual translocations for 9–10 more years and, as local population growth occurs, to also relocate surplus birds within Alberta to establish additional sub-populations. This strategy of using translocations along with relocations over extended periods (10 plus years) has proven to be a successful approach for building sustainable wild turkey populations in other jurisdictions.

## Photos



Photo 1. Alberta Conservation Association senior biologist, Mike Jokinen, and volunteer biologist, Emily O'Donovan, transferring a wild turkey into a transport box inside a funnel trap in Kimberley, British Columbia. Photo: Mike Verhage



Photo 2. Alberta Conservation Association's Trevor Council and volunteer veterinarian, Amélie Mathieu, assessing body condition and sampling wild turkeys for potential disease agents in Kimberley, British Columbia. Photo: Mike Verhage