

**Alberta Conservation Association
2024/25 Project Summary Report**

Project Name: Turkey Surveys and Population Augmentation

Wildlife Program Manager: Doug Manzer

Project Leader: Mike Verhage

Primary ACA Staff on Project: Paige Asplund, Trinie Chisholm, Trevor Council, Brad Downey, Stefanie Fenson, Jeff Forsyth, Easton Fritz, Kevin Gardiner, John Hallett, Jalen Hulit, Tyler Johns, Michael Jokinen, Paul Jones, Kris Kendell, Julie Landry-DeBoer, Megan Langfield, Doug Manzer, Kade McCormick, Susan Peters, Emily Purvis, Corey Rasmussen, Amanda Rezansoff, Dayce Rhodes, Phil Rose, Michael Uchikura, Jaclyn Vanderfluit, and Mike Verhage

Partnerships

Alberta Animal Health	Minister's Special Licence Raffle Funds
British Columbia Animal Health Centre	Grants Program
Calgary Fish & Game Association	Regional District of East Kootenay
Chin Ridge Seeds	Regional District of Kootenay Boundary
City of Castlegar	Sarcee Fish & Game Association
Government of Alberta	Trowalex Equipment Rentals & Sales
Government of British Columbia	(Harold Chernoff)
Hillcrest Fish & Game Association	University of Guelph
Kalesnikoff Lumber Co. Ltd.	Zone 1 – Southern Alberta Fish & Game
Landholders in southwestern Alberta	Society
Lethbridge Fish & Game Association	

Key Findings

- We contacted landowners across known wild turkey range to gather winter counts. Numbers were tracking down with an aggregate count of 840 in 2021, 792 in 2022, and 637 in 2023, however over the last two years, numbers slightly resurged in 2024 with 677 birds and then made a jump to 924 in early 2025.
- We conducted an annual volunteer summer brood survey that, in 2024, had 23 respondents return a count of 39 hens with 83 poults for a ratio of 2.13 poults per hen. This sample size of replies is too low to assume the population is currently stable, although it is evidence of recruitment from within the population. A ratio above 2:1 is considered a threshold for a stable population.
- We translocated 484 wild turkeys from southeastern British Columbia into southwestern Alberta from 2023 to 2025.
- We translocated 124 turkeys from British Columbia into southwestern Alberta in early 2025. The birds were released in six locations to jump-start sub-populations.
- We tested all captured wild turkeys that were destined for release in Alberta. Any birds that tested positive for disease agents were not released in Alberta.

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 840 in 2021, 792 in 2022, down to 637 birds in 2023, then 677 in

2024, and up to 924 in early 2025. We do not know if this count is accurate, though we suspect it is a reasonable index for tracking the trend.

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 four years suggests recruitment has been low during this period (poults:hen – 1.44:1 in 2021, n=19; 0.97:1 in 2022, n=22; 1.60:1 in 2023, n=46; and 2.13:1 in 2024, n=23). 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. We have translocated 484 birds to date, including 124 birds released at six sites in early 2025. This number is down from previous years, due to the positive test results for 49 birds that were not released in Alberta. We foresee the need to continue annual translocations for eight to ten 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 (ten plus years) has proven to be a successful approach for building sustainable wild turkey populations in other jurisdictions.

Photos



Photo 1. Alberta Conservation Association staff members Mike Jokinen and Dayce Rhodes attaching a backpack satellite tag to an adult hen turkey in Castlegar, British Columbia. Photo: Mike Verhage



Photo 2. Before being released in Alberta, turkeys are temporarily held in holding pens, while Alberta Conservation Association staff await disease test results in Castlegar, British Columbia. Photo: Mike Jokinen