



Let's Talk Turkey

Lesson activity – Wild Turkey Management

Wild Turkey and Predators

From the time an egg is laid, there is a predator looking for a ready-made omelet. Snakes of all descriptions, skunks, crows, ravens, opossums, raccoons, rodents, dogs and coyotes, to name a few, are on the lookout for a next and easy lunch. About half of the turkey nests make it to hatching.

Life is no easier for a turkey poult either. The above listed predators, along with hawks, owls, foxes, and other large predators like cougars and eagles in some parts of the country, will grab a young unsuspecting poult. The point to remember is that all these predators will take turkey eggs, poults or under the right circumstances, adults; but most of their diet consists of small birds, rodents and rabbits.

Role of Habitat

Habitat quality is also an important part of how a species survives pressure from predators. Early successional plant stages, or those that follow a habitat disturbance and need full sunlight, provide shelters for high numbers of small mammals, including rats and mice, which are the normal diet of many predators. This benefits wild turkeys, too.

The location of these habitats, and their plant diversity, can mean life or death to individual wild turkeys. Case in point; if the ground-level vegetation is sparse, the hen and poults become vulnerable to predators. On the other hand, if suitable habitat with good cover is available to the brood groups, the poults have a better chance of living. How we manage the plant communities, and where they are located, is critical to wildlife populations – and it doesn't matter whether you are dealing with songbirds or wild turkeys. Habitat quality and its distribution are more important than the number of predators.

Predator Management

Controlling predator population has always been a controversial issue. There are situations where it may have a place, such as an area with a newly established population of rare species. However, making an impact on a predator population is very expensive and labor intensive. Even after going to the trouble of removing hundreds of wild turkey predators from an area over several years, it is doubtful that you would see a significant increase in the numbers of wild turkeys. This is due in part to the movement of more predators from surrounding habitats in the area.