

# ***SPRINGTIME DECISIONS***

**Now is the time to spread your wings and try something new!**

*by Heidi Rao*



For most people, every November our minds turn to turkey. With this traditional culinary delight, comes the annual question – “What type of turkey do I want this year.” We have many options for our Thanksgiving main course centerpiece to please the most discerning palate. We can choose from roasted turkey, smoked turkey, fried turkey, the exotic Turducken, or any other

regional adaptation of custom. This gives the *Turkey Connoisseur* many options to keep his or her Thanksgiving exciting instead of getting stuck in a holiday rut.

For many sportsmen and sportswomen, springtime brings turkey back to our thoughts! Turkey becomes an obsession to many hunters that continue hunting when the vast majority of sportsmen and women have put their rifles, shotguns, and bows away. To turkey hunters, the season is far from over. Like the choices we have for our Thanksgiving bird, turkey hunters have their own choices when it comes to planning their spring season trip or their multiple hunts for multiple sub-species.

When it comes to wild turkey, turkey hunters have a choice of 5 North American species and 1 Central American species. The North American species consist of the Eastern Turkey, the Rio Grande Turkey, the Merriam's Turkey, the Gould's Turkey, and the Osceola Turkey. The South American species is the Ocellated Turkey. Each one of these birds have their own unique qualities, traits, and challenges.

## **Springtime Turkey Menu:**

## North American Species

### ***EASTERN WILD TURKEY***



*photo by NWTF*

**Range:** The Eastern Wild Turkey is the most abundant turkey species, topping the list with over 5 million birds. These turkeys can be found in the Eastern United States and Canada. While residing in 40 states and numerous Canadian Provinces. This sub-species gives the turkey hunter many opportunities to pursue.

**Physical Traits:** Iridescent bronze body with white and black bars on their wings; brown tips on their tail feather; longest beards of all the sub-species; can stand up to 4' tall

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 30 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 12 pounds

**Challenges:** The Eastern Wild Turkey can be difficult to call for the beginner.

## ***RIO GRANDE WILD TURKEY***



**Range:** The Rio Grande Wild Turkey, like the eastern wild turkey, also offers the hunter many opportunities and chances to pursue this sub-species. There are well over 1 million of these birds in the wild. These turkeys can be found in the central plain states, including Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. They can also be found in the western states such as Colorado, Oregon, Washington, and California. Rio Grande Wild Turkey have also been introduced to Hawaii in the 1950's and that state sports a healthy population. Additionally, they can be found in large numbers in Northern Mexico for the international hunter.

**Physical Traits:** Iridescent green and copper body with white and black bars on their wings; brown tips on their tail feathers and lower back feathers; very long legs; average size beards and average size spurs relative to the other sub-species

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 20 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 12 pounds

**Challenges:** The Rio Grande Wild Turkey is a very suspicious and extremely cautious bird.

## ***MERRIAM'S WILD TURKEY***



*photo by NPS*

**Range:** The Merriam's Wild Turkeys' population sits at about 500,000 birds. These turkeys can be found in the Mountainous areas of the Rocky Mountain states. These birds can be found as far south as New Mexico, following the Rocky Mountains, up through Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho and the high plains of the Dakotas and Nebraska. Their habitat includes areas with high altitude pine tree species such as ponderosa, lodge pole, and white bark pine trees.

**Physical Traits:** Iridescent purple and bronze body; white tips on their tail feathers and lower back feathers with more white than black bars on their wings; shortest size beards and smallest size spurs of all sub-species

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 30 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 12 pounds

**Challenges:** The Merriam's Wild Turkey are found in the same habitat that elk are so getting to good habitat can be strenuous. They are also harder to call than Rio Grande Wild Turkey.

## ***GOULD'S WILD TURKEY***



*photo by NPS*

**Range:** The Gould's Wild Turkey is confined to the southern parts of Arizona and New Mexico. Their numbers in the United States in these two states are limited and thus have limited hunting opportunities. Fortunately, Gould's Wild Turkeys exist in large numbers in Northern and Central Mexico offering hunters excellent opportunities if they are willing to head South-of-the-Border.

**Physical Traits:** Overall, the largest of all the sub-species; Iridescent green and gold body; white tips on their tail feathers and lower back feathers with uniformed coloration on their wings; long legs; average size beards and average size spurs relative to the other sub-species

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 30 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 12 pounds

**Challenges:** The Gould's Wild Turkey prefers arid and rugged mountainous areas of the southern desert making getting to their habitat difficult.

## ***OSCEOLA WILD TURKEY***



*photo by NPS*

**Range:** The Osceola Wild Turkey, also known as the Florida Wild Turkey, is found only in the southern portions of Florida. The Osceola Wild Turkey numbers are estimated at less than 100,000 birds. Like the Gould's Wild Turkey, the taking of Osceola Turkey is more regulated than the Eastern or Rio Grande Turkey. Even though this sub-species is only found in Florida, hunting opportunities are still fairly easy to obtain.

**Physical Traits:** Iridescent green and purple body; dark brown tips on their tail feathers and white and larger black bars on their wings; long legs; average size beards and very long spurs relative

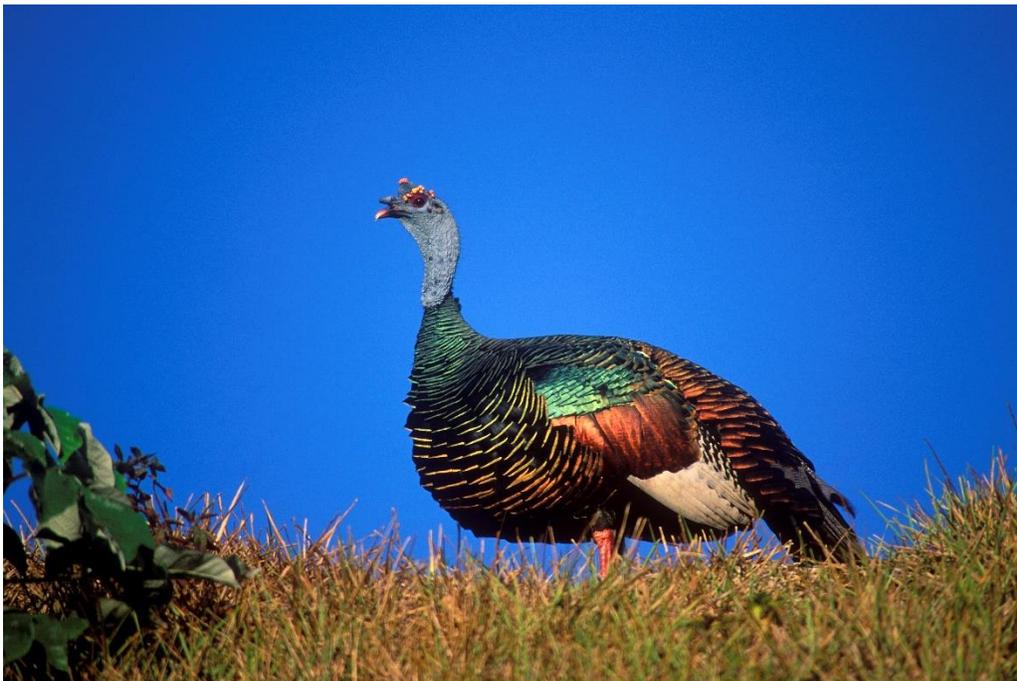
to the other sub-species; The Osceola Wild Turkey is smaller and darker than the Eastern Wild Turkey

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 20 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 12 pounds

**Challenges:** The Osceola Wild Turkey is the most difficult of all the sub-species to call in.

## South American Species

### ***OCELLATED WILD TURKEY***



*photo by NWTF*

**Range:** The Ocellated Wild Turkey can only be found in the Yucatan Peninsula region of Mexico, northern Belize, and northern Guatemala. Because of the Ocellated Wild Turkeys' remote jungle habitat in deep Central America, hunting opportunities of the average turkey hunted may be

limited. The most limiting factor in accessing these birds is getting to where they live internationally. Once the sportsman makes travel plans and arrives in this sub-species range, finding hunting opportunities can be easier than the traveling.

**Physical Traits:** Iridescent multi-color body; gold tips on their tail feathers with blue and bronze spots on their feathers and lower back feathers with white and black bars on their wings; This species does not possess a beard but makes up for it with very long spurs; The Ocellated Wild Turkey is described by some like a peacock because of its colorful feathers and bright blue head

**Size:** Toms can weigh up to 12 pounds; Hens can weigh up to 8 pounds

**Challenges:** It is almost impossible to call in since they do not gobble like the North American sub-species. They are either shot from the roost or are ambushed on their travel routes.