



DEC NEEDS HELP WITH TURKEY COUNT

by Joel W. Allen, Cooperative Extension Educator

I know, some of you are already asking what does a wild turkey survey have to do with gardening. However, I know several area gardeners who have had the occasion to curse a flock or two of turkeys over the years that have been in or around their gardens. Wild turkeys can cause a great deal of damage in a strawberry or blueberry patch, in fruit trees and ornamentals, and to all kinds of vegetables. While there currently is no effort by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to eradicate or even reduce the wild turkey population, they are doing some tracking and they need the help of landowners.

In 2006, the DEC worked with over 100 landowners from throughout New York State who assisted in conducting a turkey banding project or reported winter turkey flocks. This was their first major field assessment of wild turkey management in the state since the 1970's. The DEC has partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation to conduct a four-year study in which wild turkeys are being captured and fitted with leg bands. At the same time, the DEC is collecting data on winter turkey flocks across the state to assess the feasibility of a long-term population monitoring program. Last year, they sought several locations in every county where they were able to count turkeys to monitor population changes and they are doing the same again this year.

A recent release from the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources of the DEC in Albany states that in 2006, they banded 296 gobblers and 350 hens in DEC Regions 3 - 9. (Columbia, Rensselaer, and Greene Counties are in Region 4. Dutchess is in Region 3) and recorded information on 570 flocks throughout the state.

DEC is once again looking for landowners within DEC Regions 3 - 9, who are interested in helping with these efforts this year. They are seeking landowners who would be willing to have turkeys netted and banded as well as alerting project coordinators when they see flocks of turkeys using their land.

Once trapped and banded, the turkeys will be immediately released in the same area. No turkeys are harmed during this process nor are they removed from your location. The objective of the banding study is to examine the impacts of turkeys on agricultural resources in the study.

For the winter flock survey, DEC needs landowners, hunters, birdwatchers and others to report on winter turkey flock locations from anywhere in New York State. Observations of turkey flocks, even a few birds, during March can be reported to the project coordinator for your region.

If you would be willing to help or want to learn more about this project, you are invited to contact Karl Parker in Schenectady for Region 4 at 518-357-2154. For Dutchess County landowners, contact Pat Vissering at the Region 3 office in New Paltz at 845-256-3090.

As I have said here before, Happy Gardeners are those who have a good handle on the pests in their yards and gardens and to many of us, wild turkeys are pests. DEC wants your help. Happy Gardening!

For more information on gardening, contact your Master Gardener volunteers at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia County, 479 Route 66, Hudson, NY 12534 by phone at (518) 828-3346 or via email at columbia@cornell.edu. Visit our web site at www.cce.cornell.edu/cornell/ under "Need Help with Gardening Questions" for the appropriate form on which to submit a question via email.###