

## **The Wild Turkeys of Connecticut**

By Guy Vecchitto, Killingworth Conservation Commission

Did you know the story about Benjamin Franklin wanting the National Bird to be a turkey is just a myth? Franklin did write that in comparison to the bald eagle, the turkey is “a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America...He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage.” So although Benjamin Franklin defended the honor of the turkey against the bald eagle, he did not propose its becoming one of America’s most important symbols. Too bad. Because...did you know few predators are able to catch an adult wild turkey due to its well-developed instinct for survival, excellent eyesight, and hearing? Did you know turkeys can fly up to 55 miles per hour for a short distance and they can run 18 miles per hour on foot? Wow!

The diet of wild turkeys includes acorns and other mast (hard fruit), fleshy fruits, corn, a variety of seeds, and invertebrates. Young turkeys (poults) feed heavily on insects. Hopefully, they will be consuming many of our pesky ticks this year! Wild turkeys inhabit a mixture of mature hardwood forests and open fields. They are frequently seen foraging in fields that border forestland. However, in some areas of dense human populations, where food and cover are plentiful, turkeys have adapted and seem to survive well.

There are a few things we can do around our home to help turkeys. We can encourage the growth of grape vines, hawthorn trees, juniper bushes, and winterberry to produce food and cover. If you grow some corn in your garden leave a few edge rows of corn (preferably in isolated areas) as a winter food source for them. If you see a turkey, take a few moments to watch it saunter about. You won’t be disappointed in all you witness. As Benjamin Franklin said, they are a little silly too!