

Arizona Wildlife Podcast

Transcript: Episode 15 – Turkey Restoration

(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)

The content for this episode came from a public speaking engagement at the Arizona Game and Fish Headquarters in Phoenix on November 6, 2008. The topic of the talk was turkeys in Arizona.

Listen as Brian Wakeling, big game program supervisor for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, discusses some of the restoration projects that have taken place to bring turkeys back to the state. Following the presentation, the audio was edited for flow to improve understanding.

BRIAN:

In 1983, we started moving turkeys into, uh, the Huachucas. I say we kind of in the Victorian sense because, uh, I didn't have a darn thing to do with it and the Arizona Game and Fish Department had very little to do with it. Fort Huachuca military personnel were really involved in it. They were working with Mexico and we did two releases. Uh, released nine birds the first time. Did that in 1983. As they released them and they were watching them walk off they thought, "Wow, nine hens. Uh, you suppose we need a gobbler to make this work?" And uh, so, in 1987 they released twelve and in, uh, that year they actually had a few hens and a few gobblers so they thought it was going to be much more successful. It took several years, but that population finally did start to take off.

In about 1994 we went and got twenty-one birds from Mexico. It was quite an involved process, much more so than it had been in the 1980s. And we moved them into the Galiuros. Uh, in 1997 we went back and brought another forty-nine birds up that time, uh, forty-eight birds and released them. The Galiuros have never really taken off. They kind of have been hanging in there at a low level.

Um, I think it was around 2002, 2003, we had a local landowner down in the, uh, Chiricahua Mountains that helped us and basically constructed a quarantine facility in cooperation with the National Wild Turkey Federation. They funded it. It cost about \$140,000 to build. Uh, they got it built in a six month period of time and we had turkeys in it that winter. We brought turkeys from Mexico, held them in the quarantine facility and then, after they cleared two disease tests because of the international border crossing, then we were able to release them. And we released them in the Chiricahua Mountains. And the population took off and it's doing incredibly well.

We now hunt turkeys in the Chiricahuas. We hunt turkeys in the Huachucas. This year, we hunted turkeys in the Pinalenos for the first time, Mount Graham. You know it's just...keeps...keeps expanding. We've got them in the Catalinas. We've got them in the Santa Ritas. Uh, the populations are doing well, and we'll probably start to see some additional hunts come online as those populations continue to expand.

This is a population that had been extirpated. We now have...I...our estimates are about a thousand animals in the state now. And it...they're...they're doing tremendous. It's a huge success story. In New Mexico, the population was never extirpated. However, they haven't been able to really have the successes that we've been seeing. Nevertheless, they're probably going to bring their first hunt on

this...this spring. Probably going to see a couple of tags over there. So, those guys have been doing real well.

PARTICIPANT:

One of the places that I've seen an abundance of turkeys is 3C East.

BRIAN:

Okay. Okay.

PARTICIPANT:

And I've always noticed that they have a spring hunt but not a fall hunt. And I was wondering if maybe the reason is because maybe Game and Fish uses that area as a trapping area for transporting turkeys.

BRIAN:

That absolutely is the reason we are doing that right now. The other part of that is when...when the Rodeo-Chediski Fire went through there, 3A and 3C, we kind of...we backed off all the hunts there for a little bit. Since that time, that population's been doing really, really well. It's been coming back great. Uh, so have the elk up there.

PARTICIPANT:

Hmmm.

BRIAN:

And so, uh, we moved somewhere in the neighborhood of sixty birds out of there last year. Somewhere between sixty and ninety birds a year for the last three years out of there, and we've been moving them to other parts of the state.

PARTICIPANT:

There's a lot of birds in there.

BRIAN:

Yeah. That's exactly why we're not having a fall hunt right now.

PARTICIPANT:

You're just moving them out of there to keep the population manageable or...?

BRIAN:

Well, we're moving them out of there to put them in other places. Uh, we've started to put them back on Mingus Mountain. Uh, we've put them in the upper Verde, uh, the upper Verde River along that cottonwood drainage there. And we've also put them on Pine Mountain in Unit 21. And so...trying to get their...their range expanded. Trying to, you know, to get them into, uh, a lot of the places that...that typically historic range where we had them at one time but for whatever reason...any...you know Mingus Mountain is one of the places where we've put turkeys in the past and haven't had a whole lot of luck getting them to take off. The last couple of years it seems to be doing pretty good. So we're real encouraged by that.

This podcast is brought to you by the Environmental Education section of the Arizona Game and Fish Department and is made possible through the Heritage Fund and the Arizona Lottery. For supplemental

information and activities for this podcast, please visit www.azgfd.gov/focuswild and click on the podcasts button.

Thank you.