



PRESERVE!

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Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Newsletter

*Dedicated to the Preservation and Stewardship of our Woodlands,
Wetlands, Prairies and Shorelines*

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A New Breeding Bird in the Preserve

by Glenda Denniston

A Wild Turkey Nest

Several times this spring, students working with me noticed a hen Turkey feeding in the restored savanna planting by the big oak close to the field near Frautschi Point. Not long after this I saw her near the top of the Gully. I wondered if she were nesting, but did not search for a nest.

Late in June, I almost stepped on a Turkey nest while checking on the health of a small Bur oak in the field. The hen Turkey flushed up from the ground right in front of my face. She had been incubating ten eggs, which I quickly photographed before leaving the area so that I would not keep her from her nest.



Ten Turkey Eggs in a Nest in Field (G Denniston)

Turkeys in the Preserve

Last year was the first year that Turkeys regularly appeared in the Preserve during the breeding season. Before that they were only occasionally reported in the Preserve. This is the first year that we found evidence of nesting. Earlier this year, a hen was flushed from a different nest near the Biocore Prairie, but that nest was later abandoned. It is not clear whether the present nest was made by the same Turkey.

At the time of this writing, the hen is still incubating. Turkeys lay from eight to twelve eggs, one daily, and do not start incubating them until all eggs are laid. Females incubate the eggs for 28 days. All the eggs hatch at the same time, so all the young, called poults, are the same age.

If the eggs are viable and no disaster strikes, they should hatch. I do not know when incubation began or if there are still 10 eggs. After the first startling discovery of the nest, I checked it daily when I was in town, approaching the nest slowly and talking softly to the Turkey all the time. She does not leave the nest, but allows me to approach closely. Probably this is the

same female Turkey that the gardeners have seen in early mornings in the FHA Gardens. She takes dust baths and hunts for food in the Gardens. Last week, this Turkey was dive bombed by a hawk. She fought back and, when the hawk retreated, stayed in the same area. Three other Turkeys, possibly young adults, are regularly seen in the late afternoon in the same general area, sometimes roosting in the tree cluster nearby and dusting in the compost piles (reported by Will Waller).

Reestablishment of the Turkey Population

At the time of the coming of Europeans to North America, Turkeys were very common in the Eastern Forest. By the early 1930s, however, they were almost extinct as the result of habitat destruction and over-hunting. There were no established Wild Turkeys again in Wisconsin until 1976, when the Department of Natural Resources successfully reintroduced 29 of them from a Missouri flock. Since then their population has increased amazingly, and they have spread throughout much of Wisconsin.

Turkey Poults

A female Turkey cares for her eggs and her poults attentively. Still, only about half of the nests produce chicks and only half of the poults from these successful nests survive to adulthood. Nests and young are vulnerable to exposure from rain and cold and to predators including raccoons, opossums, foxes, hawks, owls and dogs. Poults are most vulnerable in the first several weeks, before they are able to fly and roost in trees. Those poults that survive remain with their mother for about one year until they become adults.

Even if this nest fails, we still have a new breeding bird. Three young poults from another nest have been seen in the field. (See www.wisconsinbirds.org and Sibley, D. A., 2001, *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*.)



Hen Turkey Incubating Eggs (G.Denniston)