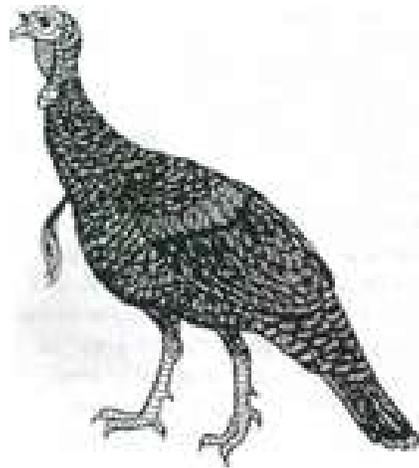

Staten Island Residents' Experiences with and Attitudes about Wild Turkey in their Neighborhood: Preliminary Survey Findings



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wild turkeys have inhabited the Ocean Breeze neighborhood on Staten Island for several years, and their numbers have increased to more than 100 birds as of winter 2010-11. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) asked the Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU) at Cornell University to conduct a mail survey of residents of the neighborhood where turkeys occur. The purpose of the survey was to determine residents' experiences with and attitudes about turkeys in their neighborhood, and to assess the acceptability of each of four possible management actions that might be taken by residents and local officials to address residents' interests and concerns with turkeys.

Seven hundred seventy-five residential property owners were identified via tax maps in the neighborhood known to be frequented by wild turkeys. Households at each of these properties were surveyed by mail on 12 January 2011. HDRU received completed questionnaires from 351 households out of the 716 addresses to which surveys could be delivered by the U.S. Postal Service, for a response rate of 49.0%. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted from 1-9 March 2011 with one adult in 100 of the households not responding to the mail survey. These interviews revealed that non-respondents were less interested or concerned about turkeys in their neighborhoods than residents, and were more ambivalent about how to manage turkeys and their impacts on residents.

Generally, most residents of the neighborhood on Staten Island where turkeys occur have experienced both positive and negative aspects of living with these birds. More respondents were "very concerned" about each of the 10 possible negative aspects of having turkeys in their neighborhood than were "very interested" about experiencing each of the 7 possible positive aspects we examined. Fewer respondents reported experiencing each of the negative aspects of having turkeys around, however, than reported experiencing positive aspects. Given that most residents express high levels of concern about the negative aspects of living with turkeys, it seems clear that they desire relief from the negative impacts of these birds. What remains unclear, however, is the specific approach to providing relief that will be generally acceptable to most residents.

This report presents preliminary findings from the mail survey of residents of the Ocean Breeze neighborhood on Staten Island. DEC will incorporate this information in discussions with residents and community leaders to develop a written plan to address residents' interests and concerns about wild turkeys in Ocean Breeze.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	iv
Introduction.....	1
Methods.....	1
Results.....	1
Summary.....	9

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Awareness of wild turkeys among Staten Island Residents. 1

Table 2. Frequency of wild turkey observations by Staten Island residents..... 2

Table 3. Staten Island residents’ interest in experiencing each of several positive aspects of having wild turkeys in their neighborhood, and their actual experiences with these aspects. 3

Table 4. Staten Island residents’ interest in experiencing each of several negative aspects of having wild turkeys in their neighborhood, and their actual negative experiences. 4

Table 5. Staten Island residents’ attitudes about wild turkeys occurring in their neighborhood... 5

Table 6. Types of actions taken by Staten Island residents to alleviate their concerns about wild turkeys occurring in their neighborhood..... 6

Table 7. Importance of various management characteristics to the acceptability of any actions used to address Staten Island residents’ interests and concerns about wild turkeys in their neighborhood. 7

Table 8. Acceptability of four possible management actions that might be taken to address interests and concerns of Staten Island residents about wild turkeys in their neighborhood. 8

INTRODUCTION

Wild turkeys have inhabited the Ocean Breeze neighborhood on Staten Island for several years, and their numbers have increased to more than 100 birds as of winter 2010-11. Many residents enjoy seeing and interacting with the birds; many residents also have expressed concerns about problems caused by the turkeys. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) asked the Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU) at Cornell University to conduct a mail survey of residents of the neighborhood where turkeys occur. HDRU staff worked with DEC staff to ensure questionnaire development took into account DEC's information needs, particularly related to possible management options DEC would consider to address the interests and concerns of residents regarding turkeys. The purpose of the survey was to determine residents' experiences with and attitudes about turkeys in their neighborhood. In particular, we asked residents to identify specific positive and negative aspects of having turkeys in their neighborhood, and assessed the acceptability of four possible management actions residents and local officials might take to address residents' interests and concerns with turkeys.

METHODS

DEC used tax maps to identify 775 residential property owners in the neighborhood known to be frequented by wild turkeys. Households at each of these properties were surveyed by mail on 12 January 2011. Reminder letters were mailed to survey non-respondents on 19 January, 2 February, and 9 February. Of the 775 properties in the sample, the Post Office was unable to deliver questionnaires to 59, resulting in 716 households in the final sample.

HDRU received completed questionnaires from 351 households for a response rate of 49.0%. In addition, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with one adult in 100 of the households not responding to the mail survey to determine if non-respondents' experiences or attitudes differed from respondents to the mail survey. Telephone interviews were conducted from 1-9 March 2011.

RESULTS

Nearly all respondents to the mail survey as well as non-respondents contacted by telephone were aware that wild turkeys (not pets or livestock) live in their neighborhood (Table 1). Most respondents see turkeys every day (Table 2).

Table 1. Awareness of wild turkeys among Staten Island Residents.

Aware of turkeys?	Respondents to mail survey (n=348) %	Telephone interviewees (n=96) %
No	0.0	4.0
Yes	<u>100.0</u> 100.0	<u>96.0</u> 100.0

Table 2. Frequency of wild turkey observations by Staten Island residents.

<u>I see turkeys...</u>	<u>Respondents to the mail survey (n = 345)</u>
	<u>%</u>
Daily	61.4
Weekly	25.5
Monthly	6.7
A few times a year	5.8
Every couple of years	<u>0.6</u>
	100.0

More than three-quarters of respondents to the mail survey experienced at least 1 of the 7 possible positive aspects of having wild turkeys around that were listed in the questionnaire (21.4% experienced 0 out of the 7; 16.2% experienced all 7). Most residents saw turkeys from their homes, while the residents were walking in their neighborhood, or while they were driving or riding in a vehicle (Table 3). Almost all (92-97%) non-respondents contacted by telephone had experienced each of these three positive aspects of having turkeys in the area.

Except for a high level of interest expressed for “knowing that the overall welfare of the wild turkeys is being considered by authorities,” more than one-half of residents responding to the mail survey indicated they were “not at all interested” or “slightly interested” in each of the possible positive aspects of having turkeys that we explored, and a majority of the respondents who indicated they were “very interested” in that aspect also experienced it (Table 3). It should be noted that most residents were at least moderately interested in knowing that the authorities were considering the overall welfare of the turkeys, and that more than one-third of respondents believed that was occurring.

More than 70% of respondents to the mail survey experienced 1 out of the 10 possible negative aspects of turkey presence that were listed in the questionnaire (29.2% experienced 0 out of the 10; 11.1% experienced all 10). When asked to indicate their primary concern, 21.3% checked “hitting a turkey with my vehicle” and 20.6% checked “worrying about losing control of my vehicle trying to miss turkeys” (Table 4). Another 15.6% indicated their primary concern was “worrying about getting sick from turkey droppings” and 12.4% checked “having to clean turkey droppings from my yard or sidewalk.” Most non-respondents contacted by telephone (52%) also had experienced one or more negative aspects of having turkeys in their neighborhood. The most prevalent concerns among non-respondents were “worrying about hitting a turkey with my vehicle” (38%), “being inconvenienced when turkeys block traffic” (18%), and “worrying about getting sick from turkey droppings” (16%).

Table 3. Staten Island residents' interest in experiencing each of several positive aspects of having wild turkeys in their neighborhood, and their actual experiences with these aspects.

Possible positive aspects of wild turkeys	n	Percent of mail survey respondents indicating different levels of interest in experiencing each aspect				Percent who experienced this aspect
		Not at all interested	Slightly interested	Moderately interested	Very interested	
Watching turkeys from home	329	42.6	17.9	20.4	19.1	73.3
Photographing turkeys	330	62.7	16.1	10.6	10.6	38.7
Feeding turkeys	331	79.8	7.3	6.6	6.3	22.8
Seeing turkeys while I am walking in my neighborhood	333	46.5	18.9	14.4	20.4	72.8
Seeing turkeys in the street while I am driving or riding in a vehicle	328	57.3	12.5	11.3	18.9	75.2
Feeling connected to nature because turkeys live in the area	331	51.1	16.0	9.4	23.6	42.7

Table 4. Staten Island residents' interest in experiencing each of several negative aspects of having wild turkeys in their neighborhood, and their actual negative experiences.

Possible negative aspects of wild turkeys	n	Percent of mail survey respondents indicating different levels of concern about each aspect				Percent who experienced this aspect	Percent for whom this was their <u>primary</u> concern
		Not at all concerned	Slightly concerned	Moderately concerned	Very concerned		
Hitting a turkey with my vehicle	326	18.4	10.7	13.8	57.1	19.6	21.3
Being inconvenienced when turkeys block traffic	333	24.9	12.6	9.9	52.6	61.1	8.5
Worrying that I might lose control of my vehicle if trying to miss turkeys that are in the street	330	29.1	11.5	7.3	52.1	35.0	20.6
Having to clean up turkey droppings from my yard or sidewalk	328	27.1	10.1	12.2	50.6	52.5	12.4
Having turkeys damage my lawn, garden, or flowers	327	30.3	13.8	8.3	47.4	41.2	7.4
Having to clean my vehicle after parking under trees used by roosting turkeys	321	34.6	12.1	10.3	43.0	34.3	2.1
Worrying that I might get sick from the turkey droppings in my yard	331	35.3	15.7	7.3	41.7	28.5	15.6
Feeling that members of my family are threatened by turkeys	330	43.0	12.7	12.7	31.5	34.4	6.7
Being disturbed by noisy turkeys	325	43.7	13.8	11.1	31.4	35.9	3.2
Feeling that my pets are threatened by turkeys	313	56.5	7.3	7.3	28.8	25.8	2.1

For 7 of the 10 possible negative aspects of having turkeys in their neighborhood, a majority of respondents who were “very concerned” also reported having that negative experience. The 3 exceptions were “hitting a turkey with my car” (23.3% of “very concerned” respondents hit a turkey), “worrying about losing control of my vehicle when trying to miss turkeys” (48.5% of “very concerned” respondents worried about losing control of their vehicle), and “worrying about getting sick from turkey droppings” (45.0% of “very concerned” respondents worried about getting sick from the droppings).

Respondents to the mail survey were split about their attitudes toward turkeys in their neighborhood (Table 5), as were non-respondents contacted by telephone. A greater percentage of non-respondents than respondents to the mail survey had no particular feelings about turkeys, suggesting that the issue of turkey management may be less salient for some non-respondents.

Table 5. Staten Island residents’ attitudes about wild turkeys occurring in their neighborhood.

<u>Attitude toward wild turkeys</u>	<u>Respondents to mail survey (n = 339)</u> %
I enjoy the presence of turkeys, and <u>do not worry</u> about problems turkeys may cause	21.5
I enjoy the presence of turkeys, but I <u>worry</u> about problems turkeys may cause	30.7
I have no particular feelings about the the presence of turkeys in my neighborhood	4.4
I do not enjoy the presence of turkeys, but <u>do not worry</u> about problems they may cause	2.7
I do not enjoy the presence of turkeys, and regard them as a problem	<u>40.7</u> 100.0

About one-third of respondents (33.9% or 119 respondents), but only a few non-respondents (3.1%), personally took actions to alleviate problems from turkeys. Those who took action usually tried more than one solution (Table 6). Most respondents to the mail survey (66.2%) and non-respondents contacted by telephone (66.7%) indicated that their actions had virtually no effect on alleviating their concerns about turkeys.

Table 6. Types of actions taken by Staten Island residents to alleviate their concerns about wild turkeys occurring in their neighborhood.

<u>Actions taken to alleviate concerns with wild turkeys</u>	<u>Of those taking any action, percent who took this action</u>
Chased turkeys off my property	73.1
Stopped putting food out for all birds and other wildlife	53.9
Asked authorities to address my concerns about turkeys	47.6
Used fencing or other barriers to discourage turkeys from coming into my yard	44.9
Parked in places not used by roosting turkeys	41.7
Removed from my yard all acorns and other seeds turkeys eat	40.4
Removed plants with fruits and berries that turkeys eat	37.2
Used a motion-activated noise or sprinkler to keep turkeys off my property when I was not home	19.3

In an effort to better understand how the characteristics or traits of possible management actions affect the acceptability of an action for addressing residents' turkey-related interests and concerns, we asked residents to indicate how important each of 13 characteristics of possible management actions were as influences on their assessment of acceptability (Table 7). Although overall effectiveness was the most important trait among respondents (70% of respondents indicated that the characteristic of being "most effective" was very important) other characteristics of possible management actions were reported as important considerations, too. Five other characteristics were very important to about 60% of respondents. Four characteristics were very important to about one-half of respondents, and three other characteristics were very important to about 40%.

Table 7. Importance of various management characteristics to the acceptability of any actions used to address Staten Island residents' interests and concerns about wild turkeys in their neighborhood.

Possible characteristics of management actions	<u>Importance of characteristic to acceptability of action</u>					<u>Row totals</u>
	<u>not at all</u>	<u>slight</u>	<u>moderate</u>	<u>very</u>	<u>don't know</u>	
Most effective	9.4	6.3	4.4	71.3	8.8	100.0
Alleviates the <u>worst</u> concern	8.7	8.7	12.7	61.3	8.7	100.0
Minimal negative impact on the appearance of people's property	9.2	9.8	16.6	58.9	5.5	100.0
Alleviates the <u>most</u> concerns	11.4	10.1	15.2	58.9	4.4	100.0
Minimal <u>cost</u> to me or my family	15.3	9.4	8.8	58.8	7.6	100.0
Minimal potential for harm to pets	12.7	7.2	12.7	58.4	9.0	100.0
Acceptability to my family and friends	15.9	6.7	18.3	51.8	7.3	100.0
Is humane to turkeys	18.0	9.3	14.3	50.3	8.1	100.0
Quickest result	20.0	10.0	14.1	48.8	7.1	100.0
Minimal cost to taxpayers	15.7	15.1	14.5	47.6	7.2	100.0
Minimal impacts on other wild animals	18.1	11.4	19.9	42.2	8.4	100.0
Acceptability to my neighbors	20.5	8.4	19.9	42.2	9.0	100.0
Minimal <u>effort</u> required by me or my family	17.9	14.8	17.9	40.7	8.6	100.0

We identified split opinions among respondents to the mail survey with respect to the acceptability of four possible management actions DEC might take (Table 8). Non-respondents contacted by telephone also reported split opinions.

Table 8. Acceptability of four possible management actions that might be taken to address interests and concerns of Staten Island residents about wild turkeys in their neighborhood.

<u>Possible management actions</u>	<u>Acceptability of each possible action</u>				
	<u>Not at all</u> %	<u>Slightly</u> %	<u>Moderately</u> %	<u>Very</u> %	<u>Don't know</u> %
Do nothing (<i>turkey population will likely continue to increase</i>)	66.1	4.5	8.5	12.4	8.5
Educate residents about fencing and other actions they can take to discourage turkeys (<i>turkey population will likely continue to increase, but some concerns will be alleviated</i>)	44.3	13.6	14.8	21.0	6.3
Harvest <u>some</u> of the turkeys every couple of years, and donate the meat to a local food bank (<i>turkey population will persist at a lower level, but some concerns may persist</i>)	42.1	10.7	14.6	25.8	6.3
Harvest <u>all</u> of the turkeys, and donate the meat to a local food bank (<i>turkeys will be absent from your neighborhood, and all related concerns will be eliminated</i>)	45.8	4.5	3.4	39.1	7.3

Demographic characteristics of respondents indicated that a mix of male (44%) and female (56%) household members answered the questionnaire. Respondents averaged 56 years of age. Non-respondents contacted by telephone were more evenly split between males (49%) and females (51%), and averaged slightly younger (mean = 50 years old) than respondents.

SUMMARY

Generally, most residents of the neighborhood on Staten Island where turkeys occur have experienced both positive and negative aspects of living with these birds. More respondents were “very concerned” about each of the 10 possible negative aspects of having turkeys in their neighborhood than were “very interested” about experiencing each of the 7 possible positive aspects we examined. Fewer respondents reported experiencing each of the negative aspects of having turkeys around, however, than reported experiencing positive aspects. Given that most residents express high levels of concern about the negative aspects of living with turkeys, it seems clear that they desire relief from the negative impacts of these birds. What remains unclear, however, is the specific approach to providing relief that will be generally acceptable to most residents.

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