

Franklin Township Environmental Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 21, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM, and the Sunshine Law notice read. The roll was called. Present were: W. Andrews, T. Biercz, J. Clyde, C. MacIvor, D. Pydeski, A. Schmidt, D. Triggs, A. Vernick, P. Walitsky, and Council liaison T. Chase.

A. Schmidt introduced Anthony McBride, NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection, Division of Fish and Wildlife, for his talk on The Wild Turkey in New Jersey (see below). Approximately 70 persons were in attendance.

After the talk, chair A. Vernick presented the chair's report – one letter was received, about a transition area waiver for construction of a single family dwelling.

The minutes of Oct. 7 were approved.

A. Schmidt reported that discussion at the Open Space Committee, regarding establishing an Invasive Species committee, suggested first having a seminar on invasive plant species. The Franklin Township Library is having a presentation on Oct. 30 from the NJ Invasive Species Strike Team. The Environmental Commission could also have a seminar on bees by the state apiarist (he is available through March).

There were no plans for review.

T. Chase reported attending a Sustainable Jersey Urban-Suburban-Rural Caucus meeting, aimed at determining whether some Sustainable Jersey actions should be defined differently for different types of communities. P. Walitsky reported that a meeting on setting up recycling of soft plastics is scheduled for Tuesday morning, Oct. 22.

Environmental Stewardship awards were discussed, with no nominations made; this will be tabled until next year.

There was no news on community gardens. D. Triggs reported a Star-Ledger article on Suydam Farms – 300 years in Franklin, which appeared on Sunday, Oct. 20.

There being public present, the public discussion period was opened, but no questions were asked and the public session was closed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 PM.

Notes on Anthony McBride's presentation:

The Wild Turkey species, *Meleagris gallopavo*, is divided into 5 subspecies (we have the Eastern Wild Turkey), plus the Ocellated Turkey *M. ocellata*, found in Yucatan (Mexico).

Males have black-tipped body feathers and appear darker than females, whose body feathers are beige-tipped. Males, and about 5% of females, have a 'beard' (modified feathers). Females, at 8-11 lb, are smaller than males, 17-21 lb. They lack spurs on the leg. A smoky-gray color phase appears very rarely.

Beards and spurs grow continuously. Males have one spur, rarely two, on each leg.

Turkeys flock together in winter, looking for food. Deep snow impedes their movement on foot (turkeys can fly well, but only for short distances; they fly primarily to roosts in trees). In the spring, breeding behavior is set off by increasing day length. Males gobble to attract hens, strut with feathers sticking out to impress hens.

Females lay eggs, 10 to 12 over a two week period, in thick vegetation; incubation lasts 28 days. Females sometimes lay in another hen's nest. The poults are precocious, they walk and feed from hatching. They can fly after two weeks, are vulnerable to predators until then. They are also vulnerable to cold or rainy weather.

Fish and Wildlife employees, and volunteers, record the size of flocks seen.

Turkeys eat many things animal and vegetable, but especially acorns. They can get various diseases, but the overall population is not affected. Thirty to 35% have been exposed to the virus LPDV, but most are resistant to it. The spirochete *Borrelia miyamotoi* is found on turkeys, may cause a form of Lyme disease in humans.

Turkeys are native to New Jersey, but were extirpated by 1900, as forests were cleared. Reintroduction of turkeys from game farms was not successful, introduction was successful only with wild turkeys from other states. It was expected that the primary range of reintroduced turkeys would be northern New Jersey (Warren, Sussex, Morris, Passaic counties), with a secondary range in the Pine Barrens; actually they do not do well in the Pine Barrens, but have been successful in Gloucester and Salem counties. The birds introduced were originally trapped in Vermont, released in Sussex County. Turkeys are difficult to trap; trapping generally uses rocket-powered nets fired over flocks attracted to corn bait (a video of this procedure was shown). Deer can interfere with this procedure.

Biological data are taken from trapped birds, and they are leg-banded. Young birds can be distinguished by dark, pointed 9th and 10th primaries, where adults have square-tipped primaries with regular bands out to the end.

Turkey populations are best in northwestern New Jersey (Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, part of Mercer) –less well in Morris and Passaic counties and the Pinelands.

Hunting takes about 23% of the population each year, coyotes and other predators about 20%. There are spring and fall hunting seasons, with a Youth Hunting Day in the spring before the start of the regular season. The fall season is less used.

In the suburbs Wild Turkeys can become a nuisance; the commonest complaint is heavy defecation by flocks. Other complaints are about roosting on rooftops and swing sets, scratching cars, blocking traffic, and attacking their reflection in windows. Fish & Wildlife traps nuisance turkeys, relocates them; few are aggressive.

In the spring hunting season, hunters attract males by imitating a female.

Turkey diseases generally are not contagious to humans.

Young females stay with the mother hen through the winter, while young males group together at the beginning of winter. They have shorter tail feathers than adult males; the longer one comes in at the next molt, beginning at the center of the tail.

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