

The Tallgrass Journal

Goose Lake Prairie Partners, 5010 N. Jughtown Road, Morris, IL 60450

Volume 8, Issue 1



Wild Turkey in Illinois, Particularly Grundy Co.

It is not unusual for the wild turkey to come up during casual conversation. It is usually referring to a recent sighting. The last place I saw one was on the east side of Rt. 47 just before crossing the Illinois River Bridge near the Morris Wetlands. It is not unusual to see a small flock of them near Pine Bluff Road, west and east of Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in the fields.

Let's discuss just a bit about the turkey. The wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is considered to be a large ground bird, weighing in at 8

to 21 pounds. They vary in length from 33—47 inches. The male turkey is larger than the female, standing about 8 inches taller and weighing twice as much.

The domestic turkey outweighs the wild turkey quite a bit. Commonly referred to as the American turkey, the common wild turkey, and also the wood turkey; there are six subspecies of turkeys. The one in Illinois is called the Eastern Wild Turkey. The others are the Osceola, Rio Grande, Merriams, Gould's and Ocellated Wild Turkey. Male wild turkeys are dark bronze-brown with black

edged feathers. Primary feathers are barred with white. Breast feathers are black tufts. They have red skin wattles, legs of pale brown with spurs. The bill is dark yellowish-brown and eyes are dark. Females appear duller and are often without breast tuft.

They eat seeds and grains, nuts, fruits, leaves, tubers, insects and other invertebrates.

Unique to the turkey is their love call. The male turkey thunders out his well-known "gobbling" call during the breeding season to attract females to mate with him. The sound can be heard up to 1.5 miles.

They breed in the spring and the males are very promiscuous. The females prepare the nest or scrape, usually thinly lined with plant material. The female may lay 10-13 pale buff or cream eggs, speckled and spotted with brown. Incubation is 28 days. The chicks are cared

(Continued on page 3)



Photo by J Giacone, Spring 2010

Inside this issue:

Turkey in Illinois	1
Park Calendar and News	2
Turkey (Cont.)	3
Switchgrass	4-5
Park Saturday Programs	6
Donate and Volunteer	7
2010-11 Hunting Review	8

Park Notes

- Dog sledding, Snowmobiling, and other mechanical vehicles are not allowed on park property. Violators will be prosecuted.
- Cross Country skiing and walking on the Goose Lake prairie Natural Area trails during winter months is encouraged.
- Morris Wetlands is open for hunting and fishing only.

Check our website.
<http://gooselakeprairie.org>

Calendar of Events

*June 4 — 27th Annual
Cabin Festival 10am-3pm*

*August 14 — Take in Day
for photos for the Annual
Nature Photo Contest
1-3pm*

*September 17 — 14th
Annual Prairie Day
10am-3pm*

*Beginning March 5 and con-
tinuing through November 12 the
Center will be open Saturdays
and Sundays from 10am to 4pm.*

We are often short handed when it comes to setting up and tearing down our gear for special events. If you would like to be "on call" to assist for our special events, call 815-942-3722.

Membership Drive

Prairie Partners would be happy to have visitor's attend our meetings.

Park News

- First Goose Lake Prairie Partner meeting of the year will be held February 9th at 1:30 and every 2nd Wednesday of the month after that in the Visitor's Center Workroom. Visitor's are always welcome.
- **Fishing Season** at Heidecke State Fish and Wildlife Area and the Mazon River in the Morris Wetlands opens April 1, 2011. Heidecke Lake boat ramps open at 6:00 a.m. to sunset and Heidecke Lake bank fishing opens from 6:30 a.m. to sunset. Morris Wetlands fishing opens at 6:00 a.m. to sunset also.
- Anyone interested in being a **presenter at the Cabin Festival**, contact Tom Kaluzny, Chairman. His contact number is 815-474-7802. We are interested in presentations that depict life on the prairie, cabin living in early 1800s, and crafts.
- The **Goose Lake Prairie Partner Website** is continually being updated. Please bookmark the page. <http://gooselakeprairie.org>

A LEATHER DEER SKIN POUCH

Deer from Grundy County



A leather pouch can hold most anything, a hand-full of change, a phone, a camera, jewelry, candy... oh my, there is room for lots of things.

Pouches are for sale in the gift shop...

\$8 to \$10.00 each.

Keep the **Prairie Partners Gift Shop** in mind as you shop for gifts...

*Many nice Books are available, some Jewelry items, Leather Pouches, Clothing & Hats commemorating the Prairie Park and Hand-woven Rag Rugs.
Payments accepted in cash and checks only.*



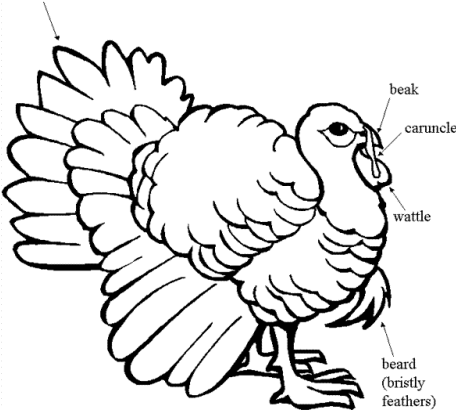
\$4.00 each

Wild Turkey In Illinois Continued

(Continued from page 1)

for by the female bird only and fledge at 6-10 days. Straight after hatching they learn to catch insects which will form most of their diet until they are about 4 weeks old, and then they will snap up grasshoppers and other insects (up to

tail feathers – male turkeys show them off in spring



4,000) each day. From six weeks old they will eat more and more plant matter.

Turkeys need a mix of trees and grasses. The trees provide some of the food, cover in which to escape predators during the day and roosting sites at night. Grasslands provide most of the food, both plant and animal. Adult birds are omnivores, taking advantage of any suitable plant or animal food they find as they wander about, scratching in soil or fallen leaves with their strong claws.

Before European settlers arrived in America, wild turkeys probably numbered in tens of millions. Overhunting and habitat destruction resulted in huge declines and a great reduction of their range. Reintroduction has resulted in restocking of the species over much of its former range and also in new areas. Today where they are not hunted, wild turkeys are happy to live close to humans, even in suburban gardens.

There is a hunting season on wild

turkeys in Illinois. Dave Wollgast, Conservation Police Officer at GL, tells us that the main time everyone hunts turkey is in the spring during breeding season. The spring season is open to archery and firearm hunting. You must have a permit that is not weapon specific. There are two zones in Illinois: north and south. This spring Grundy (which is in the north zone) begins April 11 and goes till May 12. The permits are for only one turkey (male or bearded

hens only) and you are allowed 3 permits during the Spring season. Additional information on acquiring permits, where to hunt, and on the rules can be found on the IDNR Website. <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/Pages/GettingStarted.aspx>

Conservation Police Officer Dave Wollgast, Park Supt Joe Giacone, Volunteers Art Rohr and Susie Johnson contributed to this article. References sources used : *Birds*, Sterling Pub Co., 2003 and *Peterson's Field Guild to Birds of North American*, Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Also check the *Illinois Digest of Hunting and Trapping Regulations 2010-2011* on pages 21-22. <http://www.dnr.state.il.us/publications/pdf/00000762.pdf>

Wild Turkey Harvest Records

Spring season:

Grundy: 2009 - 44 birds; 2010 - 58 birds

Statewide: 2009 - 15,494 birds; 2010 - 16,572 birds

Fall shotgun:

Grundy: 2009 - 0 birds; 2010 - 0 birds

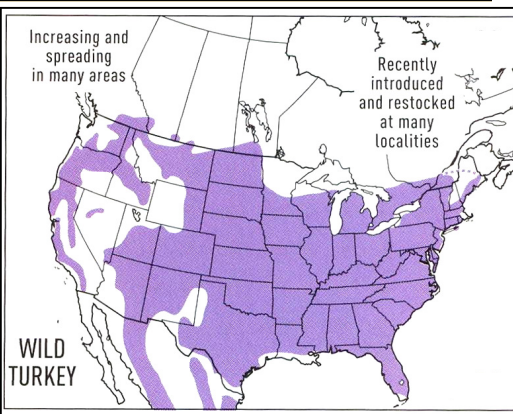
Statewide: 2009 - 761birds; 2010 - 720 birds

Fall archery:

Grundy: 2009 - 2 birds;
2010 - 2 birds (to this point)

Statewide: 2009 - 820 birds;
2010 - 683 birds (to this point)

"Grundy has a lot of birds, but does not have the habitat to support extremely large populations like some of the other counties. I have turkey hunted the last 3 years and have killed 4 birds (2 in Grundy and 2 in southern counties) I have only hunted the spring season successfully." —CPO Dave Wollgast.



November and December the Prairie was covered with snow and suffered many days of below zero temperatures. In spite of that, Hunters had a very good season (page 8).



J Giacone, 2011

Switchgrass: Native Prairie Species to Biofuel Crop

By Amy L. Campbell, M.S.

Panicum virgatum L., or switchgrass, is a warm-season perennial grass species native to much of North



Switchgrass in its native habitat at Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area.

America. Historically, it was a major component of tallgrass prairie ecosystems, although wild populations have declined in recent decades due to the loss of most of our native prairie range. Switchgrass can still be found in native prairie remnants, which are distinguished from other prairie

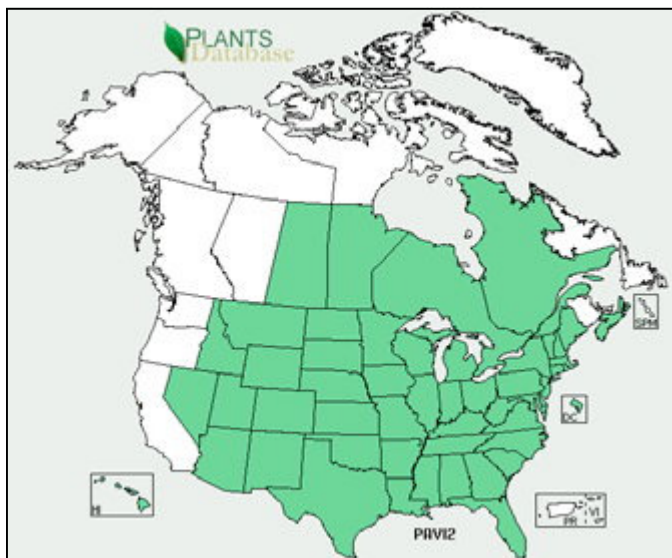
systems by the lack of human disturbance or length of time since disturbance, and are presumed to contain the descendants of the once vast tallgrass communities. Over the last several decades, however, switchgrass has been selectively bred by the USDA and others for different purposes, most recently for use as a biofuel, and mass plantings are seemingly imminent in several central and Midwestern states. The potential impact of biofuel cultivars on wild relatives is, as yet, unknown.

Switchgrass is naturally a range grass and has been fed upon by ruminants for centuries, but it became a focus of study for use as a forage crop by scientists in the early 1970's. Backed by the USDA, agronomists selected individual switchgrass plants that possessed desirable traits, such as increased biomass, high digestibility, or better winter survival, perhaps reducing genetic variability and increasing homogeneity, compared to the wild forbears. Over the years, the USDA has released several switchgrass cultivars, each selected and/or bred for specific traits.

In the late 1980's, switchgrass became one of several species of

interest as a potential biofuel crop (biofuels, whether burned or converted to ethanol, are an attractive alternative to conventional fossil fuels because they are renewable and have the potential to be more economical and environmentally friendly than conventional fuels). By the early 1990's, researchers at the USDA and other groups, like Ceres, Inc., had determined that switchgrass had great potential as a biofuel and their research efforts, funded in large part by the Department of Energy, continue to look for ways to make ethanol conversion efficient and economical. Traits that were attractive in forage switchgrass are now being selected to a greater extent in biofuel switchgrass, which could further reduce genetic variability of the cultivar. Added to this is the fact that a few research groups are attempting to genetically modify switchgrass by inserting foreign genes, or "transgenes," into the plant's genome in order to increase the speed with which switchgrass becomes biofuel-ready. Genetic modification of switchgrass is not currently practiced by the USDA, who oversees the commercial release of cultivars. However, non-transgenic biofuel switchgrass appears to be on the verge of widespread plantings across several U.S. states.

While the creation of a cleaner, more economical fuel is by no means objectionable *per se*, there is a lack of empirical scientific research about general switchgrass ecology, and virtually nothing is known about the potential impact of switchgrass cultivars on wild relatives. Some researchers and conservation groups have expressed concern that cultivars could escape cultivation and become a weedy invader or cross with wild relatives, producing hybrids that could dilute the native gene pool. Others believe that since forage cultivars were derived from wild ancestors and breeding cycles take years to complete, cultivars are not that far removed genetically from wild counterparts.



US Department of Agriculture map of native switchgrass range.



Cultivars in Manhattan, KS.



USDA image of harvesting switchgrass.



USDA image of Cave-in-Rock cultivar, Elsberry MO.

However, there are very few scientific studies that have addressed these questions directly.

Some ecologists have risen to the challenge and are trying to keep pace with agronomic research and development by addressing the more urgent questions related to switchgrass ecology. Researchers at universities such as Ohio State and Iowa State, for example, are collaborating to tackle some of these pressing questions. Hopefully soon, we will have good, empirical data that will shed light on any potential risks associated with biofuel cultivars, so we can make informed decisions about whether and where to plant

biofuel switchgrass.

Several remnant prairie patches exist in and around Grundy County, Illinois, and wild switchgrass populations can be found at Goose Lake Prairie, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Des Plaines Conservation Area, Grant Creek Nature Preserve, and Hitt's Siding Nature Preserve. While the switchgrass populations located in these prairie remnants are not large, they are nevertheless an important component of the remnant prairie community. Since we don't really know what, if anything, will happen to wild populations when biofuel types are introduced, new research is vital to our increased understanding of this species.

Amy L. Campbell, M.S. is a Ph.D. student studying plant ecology with Dr. Allison Snow at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Amy has three main goals: to determine the potential for gene flow between cultivated and wild switchgrass populations, to investigate genetic similarity between the two groups, and to examine fitness-related traits as a measure of the potential invasiveness of cultivars in relation to wild counterparts. It is important to Amy's work that she sample switchgrass individuals from truly wild populations (as opposed to restored areas).

Luckily, Goose Lake State Park has a few true remnant prairie patches, which are becoming increasingly rare and, thus, harder to find. In 2009 and 2010, with the help of prairie specialist Art Rohr, Amy visited Goose Lake Prairie and collected leaf tissue and seeds from switchgrass individuals growing in the remnant prairie patches. She will use these samples in her research, and hopefully the information Amy discovers can be used as an important jumping-off point for future ecological studies about biofuel switchgrass.



Switchgrass photo taken at Goose Lake Prairie by Art Rohr

Programs at Goose Lake Prairie Visitor Center by Park Staff...

The following is a listing of FREE programs in the Visitor Center at Goose Lake Prairie Natural Area for 2011. The programs include both indoor and outdoor programs. You can reach the Visitor Center by calling (815) 942-2899 and the hours are 10 AM to 4 PM seven days a week.



Date	Live Program	DVD Program (Anytime)
April 30	10:30 Wild Flower walk	
May 7	10:30 Spring Bird Feeding	Birds
May 14	10:30 Wild Flower walk	
May 21	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Northern Ill. Frogs
June 4	Cabin Fest - No programs	
June 11	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Reptiles
June 18	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Insects
June 25	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Plants
July 9	10:30 Gems of the Blue (Bluebirds)	Birds
July 16	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Mammals
July 23	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Insects
July 30	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Reptiles
August 6	10:30 Butterfly program	Butterflies & Moths
August 13	10:30 Wild Flower walk	Insects
August 20 & 21	Photo Show - No programs	

As the "Wild Flower walk" is an OUTDOOR program, weather may cause a last minute cancellation of planned activity. The walk is about 1 hour long and covers ½ to 1 mile, (walking shoes suggested). A 1½ - 2 hour tractor/wagon ride program is also available and is limited to 10 to 12 persons. But it must be booked at least two days in advance.

The DVD Program will run about 30 - 45 minutes long and can be requested for viewing on the TV or shown in the auditorium at anytime on the day it is scheduled. Art Rohr will be available to answer questions.

Other problems may arise causing a cancellation of programs. It is best to call and check on all scheduled programs.

ALL PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND FIRST COME FIRST SERVED.

Did you know...

- **Outdoor Illinois Magazine** is published monthly by the Department of Natural Resources. If you go to the IDNR Website, you will find a link to the webpage for this publication. A subscription is only \$15.00 a year.

In the January 2011 issue, there are articles concerning Coal Age shale exposed in northeastern Illinois, a

career as a animal control officer, the science of backyard bird feeding, Morrison-Rockwood State Park, collecting deer antlers, protecting our resources from hazardous contaminants and long distance migration of the freshwater American eel. Events at state parks are listed on the calendar in the back of the issue.

Each issue is special, with reports from all corners of the state.

Gifts To The Park Are Tax Deductible...

Goose Lake Prairie Partners are looking for a few new items to add to the visitors center as well as the park itself. If you or your organization is looking for a special project why not consider the following items:

1.) Choose a park trail and monitor it to keep it pristinely clean for our visitors.

2.) Volunteer to work the Visitor Center Desk during the weekend to help keep the center open. Normally the Center is only open on weekends if volunteers work

the center.

3.) Consider purchasing an item for the park. At the current time our "Want List" includes:

- Caterpillars for the Butterfly barn \$50.00 (Seasonal)
- New Mounted bird or mammal species
- Park Benches to strategically place around the park on various trails
- New folding chairs for our events
- New folding tables

If you are looking for an interesting program for your club or group, why not consider a Nature Program? Call the Park Desk

- Mural in the auditorium
- A chain saw sculpture.
- Website Sponsor (\$90.00)

Tax deductible gifts are recognized with a "certificate of gift" which can be used for tax deductions.

Call 815-942-2899 for more information.

Park Contacts:

Joe Giaccone, Site Superintendent

Char McDade, Office Coordinator

Susie Johnson, Prairie Partner President

Bev Mansfield, Vice-President

Jackie Martin, Secretary and Treasurer

Tom Kaluzny, Board Member

Jo Fleming, Historian.

Norma Hedges, Gift Shop Chair

The Mission of the Goose Lake Prairie Partners

Visitor's Center Phone: 815-942-2899

The mission of the Prairie Partners is to help the Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area in the following ways.

- To understand, maintain and attract the public to the park by producing various festivals, educational events, and displays centered around early life on the prairie and on the natural environment of the park.
- To provide assistance and funds as needed by the park and its staff for equipment, supplies and other items for improvement and maintenance.

Monetary or Time Donations Are Always Welcome.

Text in this publication is the sole responsibility of the authors of the articles and not the responsibility of the Park or the Prairie Partners.

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We are on the Web.

<http://gooselakeprairie.org>

ILLINOIS



DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL
RESOURCES



Take Only Memories.
Leave Only Footprints.
Thank You Very Kindly.



2010-2011 Hunting Season, a review by CPO Dave Wollgast

The deer hunting season at Goose Lake Prairie and the new Morris Wetlands was a great success this year! Of the 678 registered archery hunters for both sites there was a total of 20 bucks and 29 does killed on the Morris Wetlands alone according to the hunter fact sheets. We do not have the results for archery hunting at Goose Lake Prairie as of yet, but the numbers seemed to be good for the amount of guys who hunted it. The firearm season was exceptionally successful. Of the 822 hunters who hunted during the 5 firearm seasons we had 18 bucks and 26 does shot on the Morris Wetlands and 25 bucks and 25 does shot at Goose Lake Prairie/Heidecke Lake. The program was not only a success for the hunters, but the biologists and forester as well. The large numbers harvested will greatly aid in controlling the overabundant population which was devastating the trees the Illinois Department of Transportation had planted to help mitigate the Morris Wetlands.

We had some enforcement issues at the Morris Wetlands this season. Some guys were forgetting to sign in and out as they went into the property. Most of these guys have been dealt with and now understand the importance a little more. The records obtained from the sign in and out and hunter harvest information on the check sheet is not only a legal requirement, but helps our biologists determine what the program needs or is in excess of. The less compliance we receive on the sheets the more problems we have in maintaining the property and allowing it to stay open to public hunting. We also had some hunters who were not removing their tree stands at the end of their hunts. It is an inconvenience to carry your stand all the way in and set it up and take it down for each hunt, however, by doing so you are allowing for one of the other 678 registered hunters to also use the area.

The waterfowl hunting at Heidecke Lake was mediocre this year. Due to an

early onset of cold weather that held fast the lake remained closed for a good portion of the season due to the ice. Of the 35 days hunted the following numbers were harvested.

Canada Geese- 13, Mallards- 290, Black Ducks- 12, Blue Winged Teal- 2, Green Winged Teal- 7, Hooded Merganser- 11, Common Merganser- 9, Red Breasted Merganser- 1, Goldeneye- 125, Ruddy- 4, Scaup- 19, Bufflehead- 20, Shovelers- 28, Ring-necked- 29, Red-head- 9, Canvasback- 3, Gadwall- 29, Pintail- 2, Wigeon- 2, and Other- 1.

Overall it was a good, safe hunting season at Goose Lake Prairie, Heidecke Lake and the Morris Wetlands. We hope to have another successful and safe season in 2011-2012.

David Wollgast
Conservation Police Officer
Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area,
Heidecke State Fish and Wildlife Area, and
Morris Wetlands

Will we see You on the Prairie?