

Turkey Facts

Compiled from *More Than a Meal: The Turkey in History, Myth, Ritual, and Reality* by Karen Davis, PhD (Lantern Books, 2001).

1. The name "turkey" is believed to reflect the fact that turkeys were first imported into Europe from Turkey during the Middle Ages.
2. From the 18th century (or earlier in England and France) to the 1930s, thousands of turkeys were forced to walk from 50 to several hundred miles to slaughter in England and the US.
3. Turkeys will swim if need be. (p. 61)
4. Turkeys can fly 50 mph.
5. Turkeys are flock birds who walk more than fly in their daily excursions.
6. Turkeys have been described wading across streams in single file and flying over lakes and rivers up to a mile wide. (p. 62)
7. Like the passenger pigeons in the sky before they were exterminated, wild turkeys in Ok and TX covered the prairies for miles.
8. Before they are killed (for consumption), turkeys were, and still are, starved for about 12 hours. (p. 63)
9. Of 8,718,704,000 birds slaughtered in USDA facilities in 2000, 268,069,000 were turkeys. (p. 71)
10. In the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, canvas saddles were strapped on the backs of female turkeys used for breeding to reduce injuries from crowded overweight males.
11. Saddles were abandoned during the 1950s and replaced with artificial insemination and masturbation by "milkers." (p. 75)
12. The wild turkey first encountered by the Europeans and colonists were friendly towards people: "Wild turkeys, as the first settlers found them, were as trusting and unwary as they were plentiful" (Schorger, *The Wild Turkey: Its History and Domestication*, p. 54). (MTAM, p. 76)
13. There is no such thing today as a "pure wild turkey." Turkeys today reflect human multiple violations, manipulations, and random matings. (p. 79).
14. Turkey hunters brag about the pornographic pleasure they get from mimicking turkey courtship behavior, luring them, and murdering them at point blank. (p. 83)
15. Both turkey hunting and artificial insemination/masturbation of "production" turkeys are pornographic and obscene in a direct physical way and in the attitudes surrounding these human activities. Thanksgiving is grounded in murder and sexual obscenity. (p. 84-85)
16. The "thanksgiving" turkey is a sacrificial victim and a scapegoat: a bearer of impious sentiments deflected from their true causes. (p. 90)
17. The modern bird's swollen body, distorted physical shape, and inability to mate naturally remind us not only of the cruel arbitrariness of fate, but of the sinister power of humanity. (p. 92)
18. Turkeys are knowingly tortured with agonizing paralytic electric shocks prior to partial neck-cutting in US slaughterhouses. Every piece of flesh consumed was riddled with agony. (p. 94)
19. Many of the same antibiotics used to fight food poisoning from handling and eating turkeys are used to fight the bird diseases that make people sick who eat the birds. (p. 96)
20. Deep pectoral myopathy, a condition in which the chest muscle tissues die leading to strangulation of the blood vessels within the muscles, is due in part to the birds' "struggling and wing beating associated with catching for artificial insemination" (Pattison, pp. 19, 229). (MTAM, p. 97).
21. Contrary to what the National Turkey Federation says, Harry Truman never "pardoned" a turkey. (p. 114)
22. Turkeys (all birds-98% of animals slaughtered for food in the US) are excluded from coverage under the federal Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (1958; regs. 1978). (p. 115)
23. Ronald Reagan and George Bush (President Bush "officially" in 1989) initiated the turkey pardoning ceremony idea as a off shoot of the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan administration. (pp. 116-117)
24. By "pardoning" one turkey we are reminded that all those other millions of turkeys were not. (p. 120)
25. The American Thanksgiving is a sacrificial blood ritual and the turkey is the communal sacrifice to "unify society, a role played by war." (p. 120)

26. Young turkeys thrown into the filthy pathogen-infested turkey houses frequently starve to death, unable to locate food and water, in part because young turkeys need their mothers, of whom they are deprived by the commercial industry. (p. 125)
27. Turkey mothers are among the most protective mothers in the world. (pp. 126-127)
28. Modern turkeys raised for the meat industry are inclined to lameness, respiratory congestion, mating infirmities, and heart disease. (p. 129)
29. Turkeys and chickens are reared motherless on factory farms, in buildings in which the dimensions of time and space are reduced to monotonous extensions of toxic waste devoid of comfort, colors, and novelty, and which are filled with thousands of sick, dead, and dying birds. (p. 131)
30. Modern "production" turkeys are doubly imprisoned: in alien bodies that frustrate their natural impulses and in filthy pathogen-infested buildings from which they cannot escape.
31. Turkey hens normally sit on a clutch of about 12 eggs. (135)
32. Turkeys inside the egg communicate with the mother hen long before they are born.
33. The average hatching time for a clutch of eggs is 24 hours.
34. Turkeys have excellent full-color vision and make direct eye-contact as soon as they are born (hatch). (p. 136)
35. Turkeys do not stand and drown in the rain. Young turkeys deprived of the opportunity to dive under their mother's wings may die of chill when it rains, because they are covered with down. Or they may look up to see what is falling on them, and in doing so their noses can quickly clog with water if no one is there to shelter them fast enough, as in nature the mother bird would do. (pp. 137-138)
36. Turkey World (US industry trade magazine, 1995): At the hatchery, poults (newborn and young turkeys) are "squeezed, thrown a slide onto a treadmill, someone picks them up and pulls the snood of their heads, clips three toes off each foot, debeaks them, puts them on another conveyer belt that delivers them to another carousel where they get a power injection, usually of an antibiotic, that whacks them in the back of their necks. Essentially, they have been through major surgery. They have been traumatized. They don't look very good" (p. 27). (MTAM, p. 138)
37. In nature, young turkeys stay with, and learn from, their mother for as long as five months. (p. 138)
38. Turkeys dust bathe to keep clean, maintain good plumage, and eliminate parasites. A dust bathe is their method of practicing bodily hygiene the same as a water bath is for humans. (p. 140)
39. Turkeys "transplant" sound from one bird to another within a flock at a moment's danger. "It is impossible for the human ear to detect an interval" or to determine which bird launched the chorus or caused it to cease (Schorger, p. 152). (MTAM, pp. 150-151).
40. Turkeys dance and frolic. "They were just having a twilight frolic before going to roost. They kept dashing at one another in mock anger, stridently calling all the while, almost playing leapfrog in their antics. Their notes were bold and clear" (quoted in Schorger, p. 153). (MTAM, p. 151) "On cold winter mornings, "Frequently as many as eight or ten will participate in a sort of chase during which they will run at each other, then dodge suddenly. . . . Sometimes they will duck through or around a patch of brush to put their companions off guard" (quoted in Schorger, p. 152). (MTAM, pp. 151-152)
41. A turkey mother will fight fiercely to protect her young, showing how her individual intelligence, ancestral memories, and maternal instincts come together at just the right moment. (p. 152)
42. Avian specialist Dr. Lesley J. Rogers: "There has been a tradition of treating birds as cognitively inferior to mammalian species. . . . Recent findings challenge assumptions that have been made about brain size and the superiority of the mammalian line of evolution" (The Development of Brain and Behavior in the Chicken, 1995, p. 214). (MTAM, pp. 155-156)
43. The cruelty of turkey production and positive views of turkeys appear in an overriding media context that makes light and fun of both the suffering and intelligence of these birds. More than anything else, it is the attitude toward the information presented that constitutes the "dominance" that ensures that society's collective amnesia and willful forgetting will remain intact at Thanksgiving, ironically the holiday when memories are supposed to be in the ascendant. (p. 168)

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