The wild turkey is an iconic figure across its range in the 48 contiguous states and into Mexico and southern Canada. There are six subspecies of the wild turkey with the Rio Grande turkey (Meleagris gallopavo intermedia) and eastern wild turkey (Meleagris gallopavo silvestris) being the two most common subspecies in the Southern Great Plains. Unregulated hunting and habitat loss reduced wild turkey numbers, almost to extinction, in some areas by the early 1900s. However, due to the efforts of wildlife agencies, the birds have recovered in most areas.

Breeding season begins in March when males start gobbling and strutting, and winter flocks begin to break up into smaller groups. Most male and female juvenile birds become sexually mature before their first breeding season. Sexually mature males are called gobblers or toms, and 1/2- to 1 1/2-year old males are called jakes. Males may breed with several hens but take no part in nest selection, incubation or caring for young turkeys, which are called poults. Hens select a nest site in March or early April and usually begin laying eggs. Hens scratch out a shallow depression on the ground, usually near a log, stump, shrub, brush pile or thick grass. The nest will be lined with plant material collected adjacent to the nest. Turkey nests average 11 eggs, ranging from four to 17, which are laid over approximately two weeks. Hens need only one successful mating for all eggs to be fertile. Incubation takes about 28 days. Within 24 hours after the poults hatch, the hen and poults usually leave the nest. If the nest is destroyed, mature hens may attempt to renest, sometimes as late as August.

Land managers with turkey management goals must take into account that turkeys' daily and annual movements typically cross more than one landowner’s property boundaries. Turkeys may move from 1 to 5 or more miles per day, covering from 100 to 1,000 or more acres. This varies depending on time of year and habitat characteristics. Annual home ranges vary as well depending on sex.
gobbles of toms create an exciting outdoor experience. When managing harvest, consider taking no more than 25 to 30 percent of available males in the spring. This allows for population growth and provides future hunting opportunities. Since hunting is considered additive to natural mortality, maintaining this level of harvest over a long period may reduce male age structure and the number of males available for harvest. For more information about spring harvest management, see Spring Harvest Management for Rio Grande Turkey (www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/spring-harvest-turkey/).