

FUN FAUNA FACTS

Wood Duck

The Wood Duck is a medium-sized perching duck, about three-quarters of the length of an adult Mallard. The adult male has distinctive multi-colored iridescent plumage and red eyes. The female is less colorful. Both adults have crested heads. When swimming, wood ducks bob their head back and forth in a jerking motion, which makes them easy to spot.

Their breeding habitat is wooded swamps, shallow lakes, marshes or ponds in eastern North America, the west coast of the United States and western Mexico. They usually nest in cavities in trees close to water, although they will take advantage of nesting boxes in wetland locations if available. Their personality is shy and skittish, making them rather difficult to spot (unlike Mallards for instance).

In precolonial times, the Wood Duck was likely the most abundant waterfowl species in eastern North America. Unfortunately, their distribution within densely settled regions made them readily accessible to market hunters (their feathers used as a fashion ornament for ladies hats, among other things). Overharvesting, coupled with the destruction of bottomland habitats, drove these colorful birds to the brink of extinction by the early 20th century. The population of the wood duck has increased a great deal in the last several years due to the work of many people **constructing wood duck boxes** and conserving vital habitat for the wood ducks to breed. We have several Wood Duck boxes on the lakes at Ashland Farm. To find out more about constructing and placing Wood Duck boxes, visit this Web page: www.ducks.org/Conservation/WaterfowlBiology/2716/WoodDuckBoxes.html

Wild Turkey

Benjamin Franklin, one of this country's founding fathers, proposed that the Wild Turkey be used as the fledgling nation's symbol. In many ways the choice might have been a good one:

- Turkeys are a truly American bird. The Wild Turkey only occurs in North America and fossil evidence has shown that turkeys have been roaming here for over 10 million years.
- Wild Turkeys are intelligent birds. Though they are generally wary of humans, it is common to see small flocks of turkeys wandering along highways during the hunting season - they have figured out that hunters won't shoot them from the road (it's illegal in most places), and the highways are actually the safest place for them during the hunting season. During the non-hunting season, they'll head back into the forests.
- The chicks of turkeys are ready to leave the nest shortly after they hatch, and can feed themselves. This is an advantage over birds with chicks that need to stay in the nest for a long amount of time and be fed by one or both parents, making it more likely that they will be found by a predator.

To sum up, Wild Turkeys are an American bird, wary and intelligent, territorial when threatened, with chicks that can quickly fend for themselves. That wouldn't have been a bad symbol for a fledgling American nation, suddenly kicked out of its nest by revolution. Of course, we might not look forward to Thanksgiving as much if we had to eat eagle....

Falcon (specifically, the Peregrine Falcon)

It is a large, crow-sized falcon, with a blue-gray back, barred white underparts, and a black head and "moustache". **It can reach speeds over 200 mph, making it the fastest animal in the world.** As with other bird-eating raptors, the female is bigger than the male. It can be found nearly everywhere on Earth, excepting extreme polar regions, very high mountains, and most tropical rainforests. This makes it the world's most widespread bird of prey.

It nests normally on cliff edges or, in recent times, on tall human-made structures, such as city buildings. The tops of several office buildings in Atlanta are home to Peregrine Falcons!

The Peregrine Falcon became an endangered species in many areas due to the use of pesticides, especially DDT. Since the ban on DDT from the beginning of the 1970s onwards, the populations recovered, supported by large scale protection of nesting places and releases to the wild.

Coyote

The coyote is a close relative of the wolf and the domestic dog. The popular name for the coyote comes from the Aztec word *coyotl*, which can be loosely translated as "trickster." Coyote as trickster was a very common theme in native-American storytelling – and was also portrayed by Warner Brothers as Wile E. ("Wiley") Coyote in a series of cartoons created in the mid 1900's. However, in the cartoons, the animals Wile E. chose to pursue usually got the better of him – to great comic effect! (Hint: Some of these cartoons can be found and watched on u-tube.)

Once restricted mostly to central United States, northern Mexico, and southern Canada, coyotes have adapted to virtually all parts of North America. The settlers did coyotes a big favor through the relentless pursuit of the animal's larger cousin, the wolf, whose presence often held coyote populations in check, and through the abundant provision of garbage and wantonly slaughtered wildlife, such as the bison, upon which coyote populations thrived. In fairly recent times, coyote populations have pushed eastward into places previously unknown to them. Some of the very last pockets of unoccupied space are falling even today, such as Washington, D.C., and even New York City. Coyotes are one species of wild animal that not only tolerates cities and towns, but thrives in them.

Without question, there is no other wild animal in North America whom humans have tried so fervently to eradicate—and who have been so remarkably resistant. Coyotes have been pursued, shot, poisoned, and trapped in untold numbers. Despite all this, coyotes have survived, expanding their range with a remarkable resistance.