



STATE OF UTAH
NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of Wildlife Resources



Common Name
WILD TURKEY - RIO GRANDE

Scientific Name
MELEAGRIS GALLOPAVO INTERMEDIA

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The Rio Grande wild turkey or Rio, *Meleagris gallopavo intermedia*, is one of two subspecies of Utah's largest game bird. The Rio is similar in size and appearance to the other subspecies of wild turkey. Adult males (gobblers or toms) weigh from 17 to 21 pounds. Adult females (hens) average 8 to 11 pounds. Rios can be distinguished from the other subspecies by the coloration of the tips of the tail feathers in the upper tail coverts (feathers of the lower back, covering the base of the tail feathers). In the Rio Grande bird, these feather tips are buff or tan, contrasting with the white tips of the Merriam's subspecies. One year old male turkeys are called jakes and one year old female turkeys are called jennies. Chicks are called poults.

The Rio Grande subspecies was introduced into Utah in 1984. It is native to the south-central plains states and northeastern Mexico. The Rio prefers cottonwood river bottoms associated with oak-pine and pinyon-juniper forests.

Courtship activities begin in early spring. The gobbling of the tom serves as a challenge to other males and attracts hens to his territory. Rio Grande turkeys select nest sites that have good concealing herbaceous or woody cover and water nearby. Hens lay a clutch of 10-12 eggs which takes about two weeks. Continuous incubation takes about 26 days.

"Mast" plants such as pine nuts, juniper berries, and acorns are important food sources. A variety of grasses, weed seeds, and green, leafy vegetation are also eaten by turkeys. Insects are extremely crucial in the diet of young poults in the summer.

Rios are found in a variety of areas throughout Utah from Box Elder County in the north to Utah county in Central Utah and San Juan and Iron counties in southern Utah. Numerous other sites throughout the state have been identified as suitable habitat for Rios. Trapping and transplant of birds from other states such as Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas and relocation of birds within Utah will be the focus of management into the near future. Public interest in wild turkey management in Utah is skyrocketing and will continue into the future.

Sources:

Text modified from: Rawley, E. V., W. J. Bailey, D. L. Mitchell, J. Roberson, and J. Leatham. 1996. Utah upland game. Publication number 63-12. Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, Salt Lake City.