



The One that Got Away



The wild turkey is native to North America, an ancestor of the domestic turkey which was derived from a souther Mexican subspecies of wild turkey.

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I've always used the fisherman's "You shoulda seen the one that got away" in an ironic sense, mocking the concept that what I just missed was unimaginably fabulous. However, there really was a 'one' that got away, I wish you could have seen it...

Early in our bird-photography beginnings as a couple (about 8 years ago) we were driving through the Twin Lakes develop-

ment near Winthrop when we came upon a pair of fabulous tom turkeys trying to outdo each other in display. Wild turkeys are amazing-looking creatures; the males are in breeding plumage apparently designed by a committee of kindergarteners mentored by Dr. Seuss. The birds looked especially exotic, pumped up on peak spring hormones.

Astonishingly, they were each so wrapped up in outperforming the other that we were able to get within 15 feet of them, in

our car. We had one camera and a telephoto lens with us. As the birds strutted slowly from one side of the road to the other, we passed the camera back and forth, shooting through open windows. These were "can't miss" shots – close range, good light, great subjects. Finally, the birds walked into the woods, and we high-fived each other on our wonderful luck. As we drove back home, I decided to review our treasured images – only to discover there wasn't a memory

card in the camera. Not a single shot was recorded.

Wild turkeys are something of an environmental success story. After being hunted to low numbers by the early 1900s, conservation efforts have successfully restored wild turkeys to all 48 contiguous states. Wikipedia reports an estimate of 7 million birds in the US currently. Wild turkeys grow to substantial size (11-24 pounds as adults), but, in

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Though you can't see them here, adult wild turkeys have reddish-yellow to grayish-green legs. Also unseen, is the very poor night vision of these birds - even though they have very good eyesight in the light.



Despite their weight and size, wild turkeys are actually quite agile and fast fliers, though generally not for more than 400 meters, about a quarter-mile. In their preferred habitats of open woodlands or wooded grasslands, the turkeys may fly beneath the canopy to find perches on which to rest.

spite of appearances, can take flight easily for short distances, and will usually roost in trees at night for safety.

Ever since that missed opportunity years ago, I've hankered for another chance with the big fowl. So, this year, when I drove past a displaying wild turkey a mere mile from home, I raced to get my camera and sped back as fast as I could. As the gaudy male swaggered toward its female target, I got a few photos

to make amends for the snafu at Twin Lakes. The male moved in a stately fashion across the lush hayfield toward the female (giving me ample time for photos), but she moved away at a pace to maintain the distance between them. His display did not seal the deal, not while I watched in any event. But then again, I've observed the failure of male antics to impress nearby females in many species - even humans!