

Sexing, Aging, and Measuring Wild Turkeys

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife needs your help to correctly determine the sex and age of your harvested bird as well as accurately measure the beard and spur (if present). This information helps biologists track the sex and age structure of harvests and correlate the information to other data, such as summer brood counts.

Wild Turkey Sex Determination

The easiest way to determine the turkey's sex is by examining the feathers on the breast and sides of the turkey. On males, these feathers have black tips. The feather tips are brown on females.



Male Turkey Breast Feathers



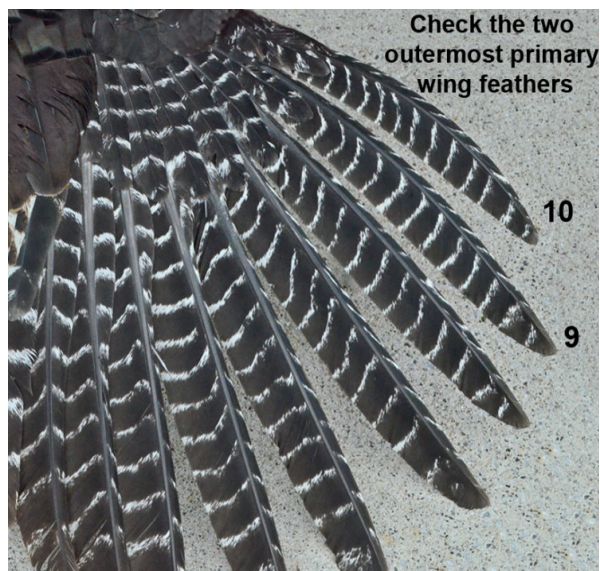
Female Turkey Breast Feathers



Wild Turkey Breast Feathers: Male (left) and Female (right)

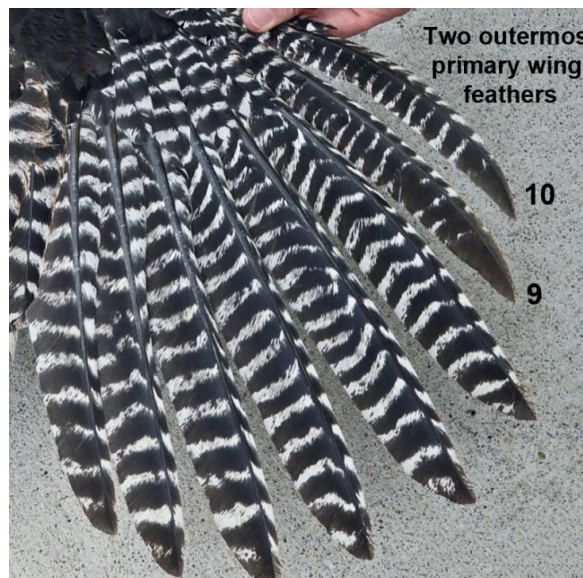
Wild Turkey Age Determination

By checking certain wing and tail feathers on turkeys we can tell whether the bird is an adult or a juvenile during both the Spring and Fall turkey seasons.



Adult Turkey Wing (male or female)

On adult turkeys, the outermost primary wing feathers (feathers # 9 and 10) have rounded tips and the white bars extend to the end.



Juvenile Turkey Wing (male or female)

On juvenile turkeys, the outermost primary wing feathers (#9 and 10) have sharp tips and the white bars stop well before the end.



Adult Turkey Tail (male or female)

On adult turkeys, all of the tail feathers are the same length, giving the tail fan an even, rounded look.



Juvenile Turkey Tail (male or female)

On juvenile turkeys, the central tail feathers are longer than the outer tail feathers, giving the tail fan an uneven look.

Beard and Spur Measurements

A turkey's beard grows out of a sheath which is attached to the skin on the breast. Beards equal to or longer than 6 inches in length are found on adult turkeys and beards less than 6 inches in length are found on juvenile turkeys. If your turkey has multiple beards, only measure the longest one for your harvest report. About 15% of hens in New Jersey have beards.



Using a ruler or a dollar bill, start your measurement where the skin meets the whitish beard growth sheath.



Measure to the longest filament. A dollar bill is 6 inches long. The turkey in the picture has a beard that is more than 6 inches long.

Spurs continue to grow throughout a turkey's life. While almost all male turkeys have spurs, it is extremely rare to find a hen with spurs. Measure the longest of your turkey's two spurs using either a ruler or the ½ inch measuring guide located on the Turkey Report Card attached to your permit.



Start the spur measurement at the point where the turkey's leg scales meet the spur base. The turkey in the picture is a juvenile male (jake) and has a spur that is less than ½ inch long.