

# WILD TIMES



KIDS MAGAZINE

SPRING 2020

**INSIDE:**

Plant a hummingbird garden this spring

Learn how biologists make sure wildlife have enough food

What can you hunt in the spring?



ACTIVITIES | LESSONS | INFORMATION | FUN

# HABITAT CONNECTION



Spring is a busy time for Wyoming Game and Fish Department habitat and access biologists. Many wildlife habitat management areas (WHMAs) do not allow people to use the land for activities like hiking, hunting or fishing during the winter time so that the wildlife that use these areas to survive the coldest months of the year do not get bothered or stressed. Once the wildlife head back up into their summer habitats in the springtime, the WHMAs open back up for people to use at the end of April or middle of May. So, in the spring, habitat and access biologists have to open up gates, update signs with important information and fix any roads that may have gotten washed out or damaged over the winter. These biologists also begin turning on irrigation systems to help grow hay and other suitable wildlife vegetation or cereal grains for upland and waterfowl species throughout the summer so that wildlife have food to eat during the winter. Finally, at public access areas, the biologists maintain outhouses and put out docks for people like you and your family to use in order to boat, fish, hike and enjoy.

Check out this issue to learn more about springtime wildlife and habitats in Wyoming!

# FIELD JOURNAL



**P**art of Wildlife Biologist Amy Anderson's job is to figure out how many animals can live in a habitat area. One way she does this is by measuring the amount of forage — another word for food — that is available before animals come to a certain area, and measuring it again after they have finished eating and migrated away.

For example, on bighorn sheep and elk winter habitat near Dubois, Wyoming, Amy and other biologists clip small circles (about the

size of a small hula hoop) of grass on high mountain meadows in September before bighorn sheep and elk migrate down from higher elevations to spend their winter in the mountain meadows. The grass clippings are weighed so biologists can know how many pounds of grass grew on those meadows during the summer. Then, in April, the biologists go back to the same areas and clip and weigh the grass again to figure out how much grass was eaten by elk and bighorn sheep on these grassy meadows during the winter.

If wildlife eat more than half of the forage on a meadow year after year, there is a chance those plants will stop growing there, and weeds and other plants that wildlife can't eat will start growing, making the habitat less valuable to wildlife. To make sure the habitat stays healthy, wildlife biologists can adjust the number of wildlife in the area or use hunting as a tool to keep the local population at a level that isn't having too much of an impact on the forage.

— Amy Anderson, habitat biologist, Wyoming Game and Fish Department

# WILDLIFE PROFILES



## **Broad-tailed hummingbird** (*Selasphorus platycercus*)

**Range:** The broad-tailed hummingbird is commonly seen in Wyoming from April to September. It winters in Mexico and Guatemala.

**Size:** It is 4-inches long and has an overall wingspan of 5.25 inches. It weighs about 3.6 grams, which is similar to four small paperclips.

**Habitat:** Meadows, open pine forests, often along streams.

**Young:** The female will spend two or more days building a nest with fluffy fibers found in willow, cottonwood or other plant seeds. Females often return to reuse the same nest year after year. They lay two eggs and incubate them for 16-17 days.

**Predators:** House cats are the most common predator of hummingbirds in towns. Large birds such as hawks, owls, crows and jays sometimes eat hummingbirds. Snakes and raccoons can also sometimes eat the eggs and young hummingbirds from a nest. They can even get eaten by praying mantids and spiders!

**Food:** Broad-tailed hummingbirds eat nectar from flowers, insects and tree sap.

**Did you know?** Broad-tailed hummingbirds show sexual dimorphism, which means males and females look different. Mature males have a large patch of bright red feathers on their throat while females do not. The females have paler colors and spotted cheeks instead.

# WILDLIFE PROFILES



## Merriam's Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo merriami*)

**Range:** The Merriam's wild turkey is found through the Rocky Mountains and the neighboring prairies of Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota, as well as much of the high mesa country of New Mexico, Arizona, southern Utah and has been introduced in Oregon.

**Size:** Adult males (called "toms") normally weigh from 11 to 24 pounds while adult females (or "hens") are typically much smaller at 5.5 to 12 pounds.

**Habitat:** Merriam's turkeys are often found in ponderosa pine forests with grassy openings, as well as on agricultural fields and occasionally near neighborhoods.

**Young:** The females lay an average of two eggs every three days until they have a total of 10 to 13 eggs. After about 28 days of incubation,

the chicks hatch. Within a week the chicks start flying and roost in trees alongside their siblings and mother.

**Predators:** Smaller turkeys, including young (called "poults") and hens can be eaten by great horned owls, northern goshawks, coyotes, domestic cats and red foxes.

**Food:** In Wyoming, Merriam's turkeys eat hawthorne and scrub oak nuts as well as chokecherry, currants and buffalo berry. The birds will also eat tender grass shoots and buds in the spring, and grasshoppers in the summer.

**Did you know?** At dusk most turkeys will head for the trees and fly up to roost as high as 50 feet off the ground. It is safer to sleep up there than to risk being eaten by predators who hunt on the ground at night!

## Turkey Talk

**Wyoming Wild Turkey History:** Spring-time is known for many things, including turkey hunting! But did you know it wasn't until 1955 when hunters could harvest a wild turkey in Wyoming? It all started in 1935, when the Wyoming Game and Fish Department swapped sage grouse with New Mexico for 15 Merriam's turkeys – nine hens and six toms. The turkeys thrived in the Laramie mountains west of Wheatland and were estimated to number over 1,000 by 1947. Some of the Laramie range birds were then used in reintroduction attempts across the state, including the Black Hills in 1951-1952. Thirty-three Laramie range turkeys, along with 15 more New Mexico transplants, found new roosts near Redwater Creek in the northwest Black Hills. The introduction served as the foundation for Wyoming's most recognized turkey hunt area.

**Why do we hunt turkeys in the spring?** Wild turkeys' mating season happens during the spring. Hens make calls to let toms know where they are and that they are ready to mate. So, in the spring, toms can be called into shotgun range by calls that sound like a hen. Turkey hunters usually wear full camouflage, from head to toe, to conceal themselves from the wild turkey's excellent eyesight. Often-times in the spring, the dominant tom will come within range while in "strut." The hunter will wait until the turkey turns broadside and the head is easily seen. This position gives the hunter an opportunity to harvest the bird with a quick, clean shot.

### TURKEY HUNTING SAFETY TIPS:

Always keep your gun's muzzle pointed in a safe direction.

Make sure you can see the whole bird to determine if it is safe and legal to shoot.

Never shoot at only sound or movement; you must see the turkey!

Avoid wearing clothing colored red, white or blue, as those colors are on a male turkey's head and neck and other hunters could mistake you for a bird.

A gobbling call may attract other hunters. If this happens, alert the approaching hunter to your presence.

Even though it is not required and turkey hunters normally dress in full camouflage, wearing a blaze orange hat or piece of clothing when walking to or from your calling spot is a good idea or when carrying a harvested turkey. It is also smart to attach orange flagging your harvested bird when carrying it.



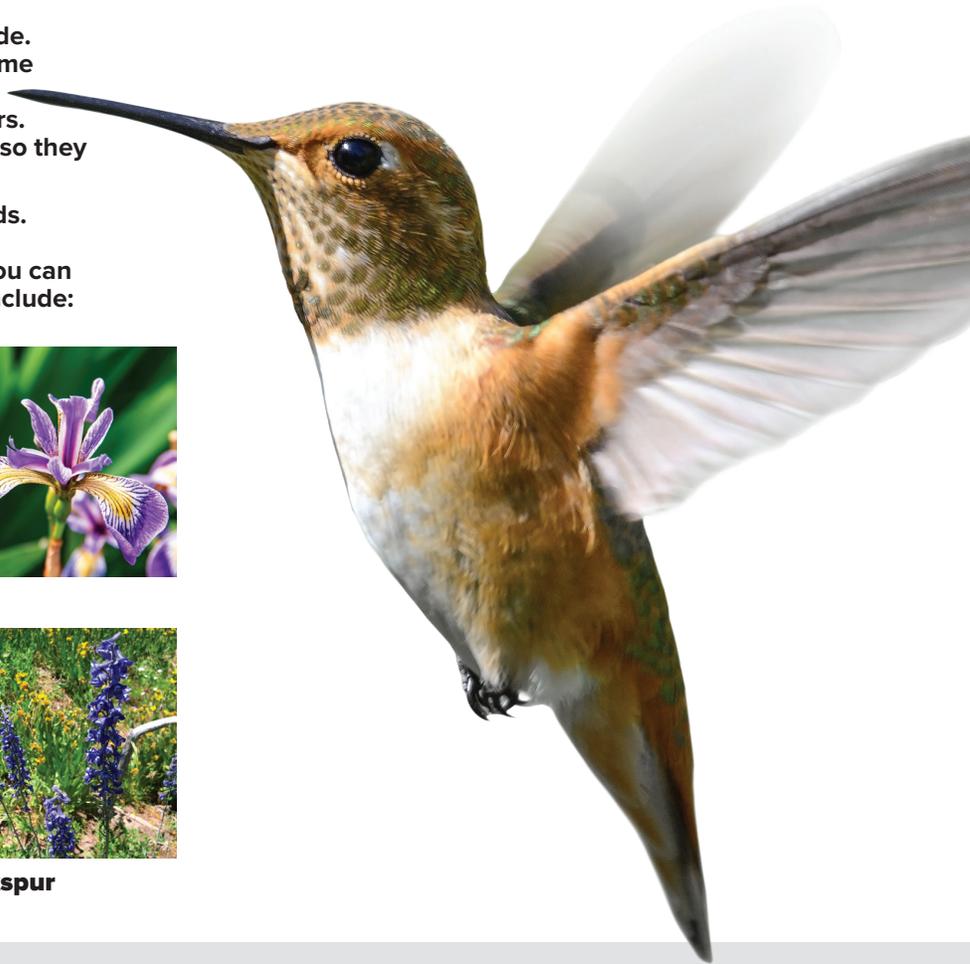
# OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

## Plant a hummingbird garden this spring!

Would you like to see a hummingbird? Make your yard a place hummingbirds would like to visit by planting a hummingbird garden this spring!

Hummingbirds like areas with both sun and shade. If you have a spot in your yard with tall trees, some medium shrubs and a grassy open area, it is a great place to plant hummingbird-friendly flowers. Hummingbirds like to perch in trees and shrubs so they can rest in between feeding.

Flowers are the best way to attract hummingbirds. They provide nectar and attract insects for the hummingbirds to eat. Some of the best plants you can buy at the store for your hummingbird garden include:



**Gladiolus**



**Petunia**



**Iris**



**Fuchsia**



**Columbine**



**Larkspur**

Some native plant species that hummingbirds love to visit include:



**Scarlet gilia**



**Jacob's ladder**



**Crimson columbine**



**Wild bergamot (beebalm)**



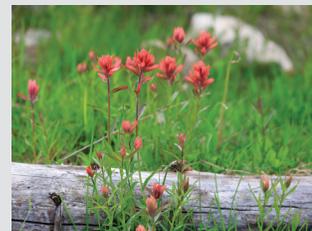
**Longleaf phlox**



**Monkeyflowers**



**Fireweed**



**Indian paintbrush**

# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

**FILL IN THE BLANKS TO COMPLETE THE CHALLENGE — LOOK AROUND THE REST OF THE ISSUE IF YOU NEED A HINT!**

Hummingbirds like to eat \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

A young wild turkey is called a \_\_\_\_\_.

What colors should you avoid wearing when turkey hunting? \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_.

If wildlife eat more than \_\_\_\_\_ of the forage on a meadow year after year, there is a chance the habitat will become less valuable to wildlife.

The broad-tailed hummingbird spends its winters in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Habitat and access biologists open up many \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ in the spring.

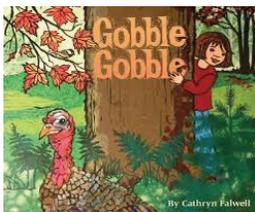
The best way to attract hummingbirds to your yard is to plant \_\_\_\_\_.

**ANSWERS:** 1. nectar, insects and sap 2. poult 3. red, white and blue 4. half 5. Mexico and Guatemala 6. Wildlife Habitat Management Areas 7. flowers

## LEARNING LINKS

If you enjoyed this issue of Wild Times and would like to see more, visit  
<https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Education/Conservation-Education/Wild-Times>

### Books to check out



**Gobble Gobble**  
By Cathryn Falwell

Follow along with Jenny as she explores the woods and learns more about the history and habits of the fascinating wild turkey.



**Hummingbirds**  
By Bonnie Bader

If you want to learn more fun facts about hummingbirds, this book has your back! It is chock- full of beautiful photos and easy-to-understand information about the tiniest birds in North America.



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