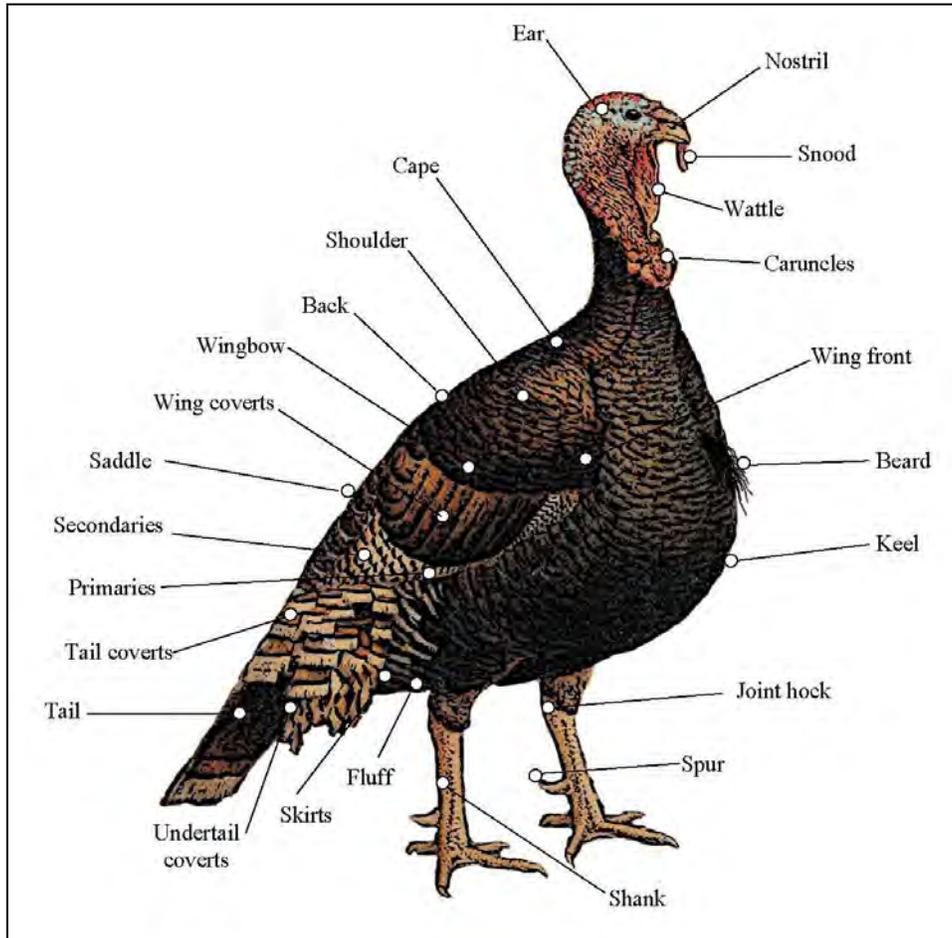


Selecting Your Best Turkeys for Breeding

Chapter 2 - Proper Conformation of the Birds

General Description of the Turkey

(Based on the American Poultry Association standards)

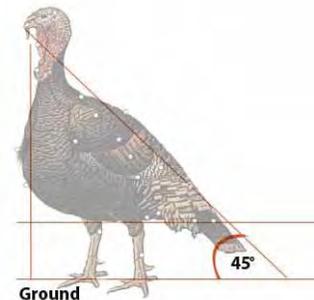


Head

The head is medium in length and is both deep and broad. Good head conformation typically reflects good breast and back conformation. On males, a masculine head (not a coarse head) is desired. Flashy prominences, called caruncles, cover the head and upper neck. The caruncles range in color from bright red to blue, flesh-colored or white, and change with the mood of the bird. At the base of the upper beak there is a naked, fleshy tubular appendage called the snood. Like the caruncles, the snood is more prominent in males than females. The snood's size and length is subject to extension or contraction, according to the mood of the bird. When the bird becomes excited the snood will become brightly colored and in males will extend several inches over the side of the beak. In females it will not extend as far. Active and colorful caruncles are a sign of health and vigor in the birds. The bird's bright brown eyes should be round and open. Alert, healthy eyes are a sign of health. Avoid blue eyes because homozygous blue genes result in blindness.

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- Beak* The beak is medium in length and should be strong so that the bird can forage effectively. The beak is curved and well set in the bird's head.
- Throat And Wattle* The throats of turkeys are heavily carunculated more so in males than females. Both males and females have large pendant-like wattles extending from lower base of lower mandible to a point down the front of neck. Overly pendulous wattles are not desirable.
- Neck* The neck is medium in length and held erect on the body. It gracefully curves along its length as it blends into the bird's back.
- Beard* The turkey's "beard" is comprised of long, bristly, hair-like feathers that protrude out of the chest of the birds. These are more prominent in adult males. They may appear in females but they are not required according to breed standards. The beard on a male can be 5-7 inches long.
- Back* The back of the bird is broad and slopes from the neck in a slightly convex curve to the tail. It is flat between the wings with its width carried well back toward the base of tail. It is particularly important to select females with broad backs and well-sprung ribs. The larger and wider your females, the larger their progeny will become.
- Tail* The tail consists of moderately long feathers that are broad and carried low in a continual and graceful line with the back. The smaller covert feathers of the tail are broad and plentiful and extend well onto the tail.
- Wings* Turkeys have powerful, smoothly-folded wings that are carried well up on their sides. Well carried wings are an indicator of good health. Feathers on the wings are broad and overlap each other.
- Breast And Keel* The frontal part of the breast is full, broad, and deep. The breast is well rounded and carried forward slightly above the horizontal. From the front, the breast should appear wide and flat. The keel, or breastbone, is 4-5 inches long in females and 6.5-7 inches long in males. It is slightly convex and should be fully fleshed throughout its entire length. Note that the keel length is similar in length to the shank of the bird. This point is extremely important for effective mating by the males.
- Body* Turkeys have a broad body that is also deep and compact. The carriage of the body is sufficiently upright so that the angle of the back is approximately forty-five degrees (45°) from horizontal from base of the tail to its shoulders. This aspect is important for fertility in that it allows the male to effectively mate. This does not mean that the body should be 'up' or carried high, but rather that the back should be at a 45° slope.



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Fluff

The fluff feathers on the underside of the body on the lower abdomen should be moderately short in length.

Legs And Toes

The legs should be medium in length, strong, straight, and of good substance. They must be filled out with flesh down to the hocks and set wide apart from each other. The feet of the birds include four toes on each foot which should be well spread, straight, and strong. As mentioned above, the shanks should be approximately as long as the keel, being 7 inches long in males and 4-5 inches long in females. Again note that this attribute is important for effective mating by the males.

Skin

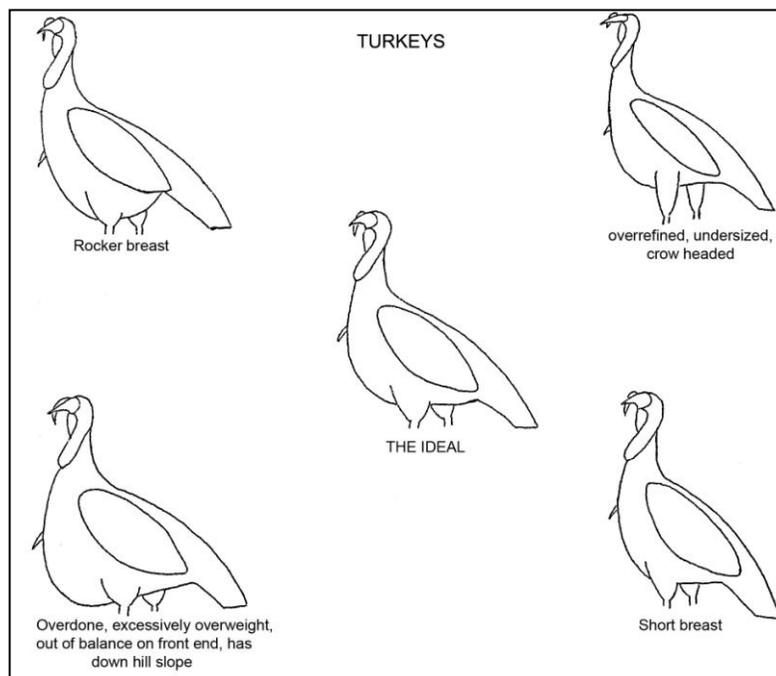
The skin of turkeys is soft and fine in texture.

Important points for breeding birds

- Longer keel and leg in males and 45° balance enables natural mating
- Select males especially for color
- Select females especially for conformation
- It takes 15-20 years to correct color and 2-3 years to correct conformation

Conformation Narrative by Norman Kardosh

All breed types should be the same, but be sure that each breed conforms to the standard color requirements for that breed. Standard weights should be observed and maintained. Use large females to maintain size or to increase size if weight is a factor. Overweight toms should never be used because poor fertility results from clumsy toms. Toms for breeders should be young toms of good type and color mated to younger or older hens. Use old toms only when a breeding program is practiced with artificial insemination. Old toms are valuable for this purpose. Cull birds with breasts that show protruding knobs on the front, breast blisters, or crooked breasts. Also, cull birds that show crooked backs and legs, crow headedness, or shortness of shanks. Shanks must be solid and medium in length.



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There are many varieties of Heritage turkeys to choose from. For physical descriptions and production information on the breeds see *How To Raise Heritage Turkeys On Pasture* on the ALBC website at <http://albc-usa.org/EducationalResources/turkeys.html>. Chapter one, “Choosing a Variety and Raising Poults,” has detailed information on the breeds. This manual is free for download on the website or a hard copy can be purchase through the ALBC office.

Know your breed’s standard by becoming familiar with the American Poultry Association’s (APA) publication *The Standard of Perfection* available for purchase through the APA’s website at www.amerpoultryassn.com.

