

# DNR, SCSU to conduct turkey study

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Cambridge, Minn. — Trapping and relocating turkeys in Minnesota will continue this year, but with a new emphasis, according to Gary Nelson, DNR turkey specialist in Altura. This year's priority release sites will be part of a three-year study.

The trap and relocation program has been ongoing for several years and has helped expand the turkey range well into central Minnesota. This year's study, conducted by the DNR with St. Cloud State University as a partner, will focus on six release sites — one each in Benton and southern Pine counties, and two each in Mille Lacs and Kanabec counties. Hens released at those sites will be monitored via radio collar by SCSU graduate student Dale Kane, under the direction of professor Bill Faber. Each site will receive upwards of 25 birds — mostly hens. Researchers expect close to 20 hens at each site to bear radio collars.

Three of the release sites will have food plots, Nelson said, while three will not.

"Part of the study is to determine turkey survival with and without the food plots," he said. The turkeys' ability to adapt to the new conditions and nesting success also are parts of the study.

"We'll see how the birds do at each site," said Dave Johnson, DNR assistant wildlife manager in Cambridge. "We'll monitor them long enough to see how they do in this part of the state and we'll determine the importance of food plots."

Johnson said most of the food plots are on private tracts of land. They vary in size, but are usually about three acres. The National Wild Turkey Federation played a large role in arranging the food plots with landowners, he said. None of the study sites are in areas currently open to turkey hunting.

Dick Kimmel, a DNR turkey research biologist and research group leader in Madelia, said depending on turkey survival in the study areas, along with the availability of birds to relocate in subsequent years, some hens could be added to the study sites during the research.

"Ideally, we'd like to have 20 (hens) going into each winter, so we could add additional birds," he said. "We'll look at it from year to year."

The DNR/SCSU study follows a similar "pilot" program con-

were radio-collared, but just five survived until breeding season. He said it was too early to draw conclusions based strictly on habitat conditions in their new home.

"(Mortality) certainly is weather-related, but acclimation is part of it, when a turkey isn't familiar with its new area," Kimmel said. In some cases, it takes turkeys time to locate food sources.

Kimmel said five of the 25 hens radio-collared for the pilot made it to breeding season, and that reproduction did occur, likely re-establishing the number of turkeys released.

## Other turkey releases

After the study areas have

received birds, turkeys — should trapping be productive — will be released at other sites in Wadena, Martin, Kandiyohi, and Douglas counties.

Birds will be trapped in southeastern Minnesota, in large wintering areas and in places there are complaints about turkey depredation, as well as at the Whitewater Wildlife Management Area.

Last winter, DNR Wildlife crews trapped and moved 272 turkeys to various sites. It was the greatest number relocated in several years, as heavy snowfall made the birds more apt to frequent the baited traps.