

# They study wild turkeys

SCSU instructor, student try to find out if birds can survive in northern Minnesota

By Hiran Ratnayake  
Times outdoors writer

The late Aldo Leopold, known as "The Father of Game Management," projected that the range of wild turkeys could go across southern Minnesota and through the Mankato and Red Wing areas.

Dr. Bill Faber and Dale Kane are hoping to find out if turkeys can go even further north than that.

Faber, an assistant professor of wildlife ecology at St. Cloud State University and Kane, a master's student, are conducting a study known as "Survival of Wild Turkeys North of their Ancestral Range With and Without Food Plots." It will monitor about 120 turkeys divided into six different regions to determine if it is possible that they can expand their population into northern Minnesota.

Faber and Kane will receive help from the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Mille Lacs and Fond du Lac bands of the Ojibwe tribe.

Expected to be at least a three-year study, the project will cost about \$100,000.

"It has never been done on a scale this large and this far north," Faber said. "It certainly hasn't been done because we're venturing into areas where turkeys haven't been before."

Studies have been done by the DNR that asked deer hunters to report sightings of turkeys. There also have been small studies that took place in southeastern Minnesota that suggested that wild turkeys have a higher survival rate with available corn.

However, no long-term study on the wild turkey's survival in northern Min-



Kane holds a 110-gram radio transmitter that is worn by turkeys. Transmitters last three years.

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that might be different from what they are used



nesota has answered the question that turkey enthusiasts have wondered about for years: How far north can they thrive?

"The main thing is to see if they survive. But, we also want to look at secondary factors," Kane said. "We want to find out what kind of native foods they are feeding on. We want to find out about their movement and home range. And we want to know what type of habitat they will be using farther north

to. Also, will they have reproduction success?"

The data will be collected for Kane and Faber through radio transmitters attached to each turkey. The transmitters can be used to triangulate the location of the birds. As part of the study, the DNR will capture turkeys in southeastern Minnesota and release them into northern regions in January, Kane said.

In the six regions, three will carry food plots and three won't.

times photos by Joaquin Siopack

"It is OK if there are no results," Faber said. "No results are results in themselves."

Turkeys are adaptable ground feeders that eat a variety of foods, plants and insects.

"They didn't do very well right away in Minnesota because of the snow," said Dick Kimmel, the wildlife

research group leader at the DNR in Madelia. "But the agriculture has changed here so they can eat farther north."

Kimmel said that the DNR realized the need for this study and the potential for wildlife research. If the turkeys survive and proliferate throughout northern Minnesota, they

might not be the only ones to benefit.

"We hope they survive on their own," said Dean Potter, president of the Minnesota chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. "Because if this works, we can provide more recreational opportunities for people to see birds."



Kane (left) takes a compass reading for Worms to record the positions of turkeys sensed by triangulating radio signals. Kane (right) records data from radio signal measurements Friday in Milaca.