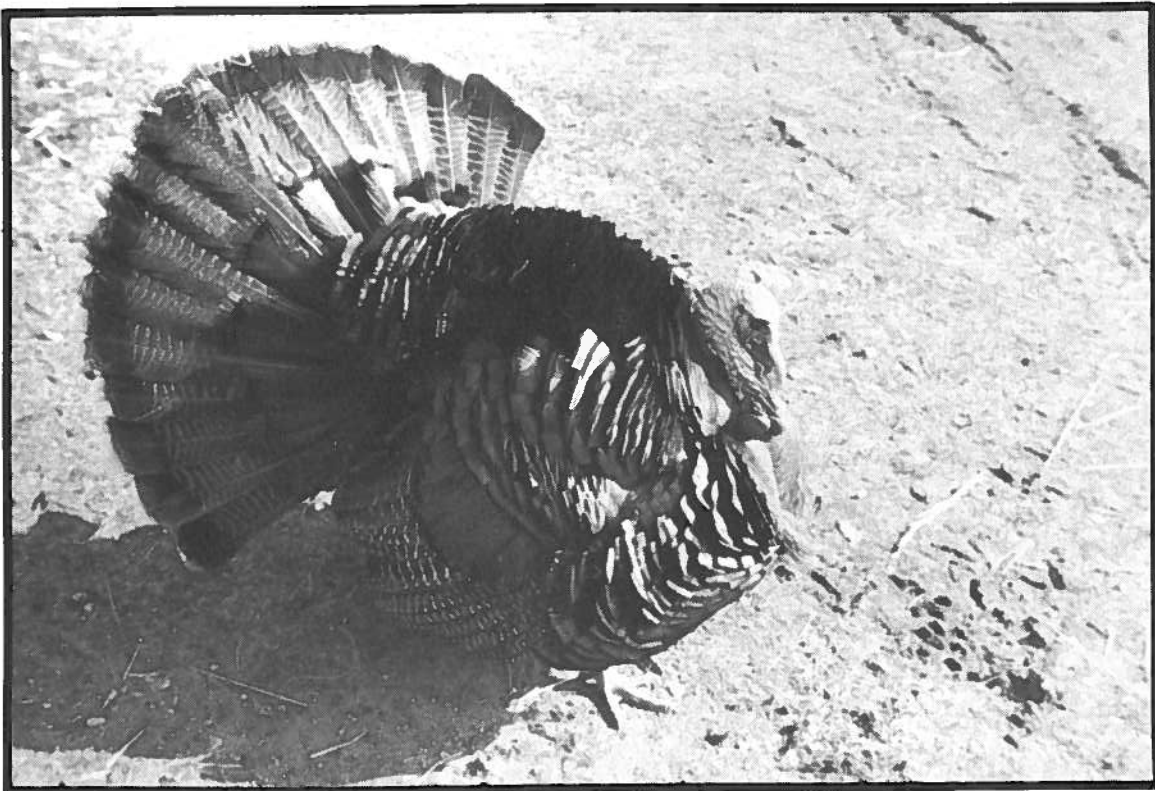


**A HISTORY OF
WILD
GOBBLERS**



UNLIMITED

TURKEYMEN CELEBRATE (Taken from the Winnipeg Free Press) Sept. 16, 1983

Twenty-five years ago, a few dozen outdoorsmen gathered at Altona for the Rhineland Game and Fish Association's annual banquet. Guest speaker was a North Dakota conservation officer who told of wild turkey introduction in that state.

That occasion prefaced the birth of Wild Gobblers Unlimited, organized by a half-dozen south-central affiliates of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation.

During the last quarter-century Wild Gobblers has grown to include 40 member associations.

Tomorrow, a Wild Gobbler silver anniversary gathering will be held at the Morden Recreation Centre. Sportsmen from across Manitoba will celebrate the first quarter-century of wild turkeys in Manitoba.

Appropriately, the guest speaker will be Lowell Tripp, North Dakota's wild turkey director. Slides and films will be shown, dinner chairman will be Andy Blatz and the proceedings will get under way at 6:30 p.m.

HISTORY FROM 1957 to 1979

Wild Gobblers Unlimited

MANITOBA

UPDATED MARCH 1979



The idea of establishing an organization to bring wild turkeys into Manitoba probably came from hearing a speaker from North Dakota give a talk on North Dakota's wild turkey program during the annual banquet of the Rhineland Game and Fish local of Altona in the spring of 1958.

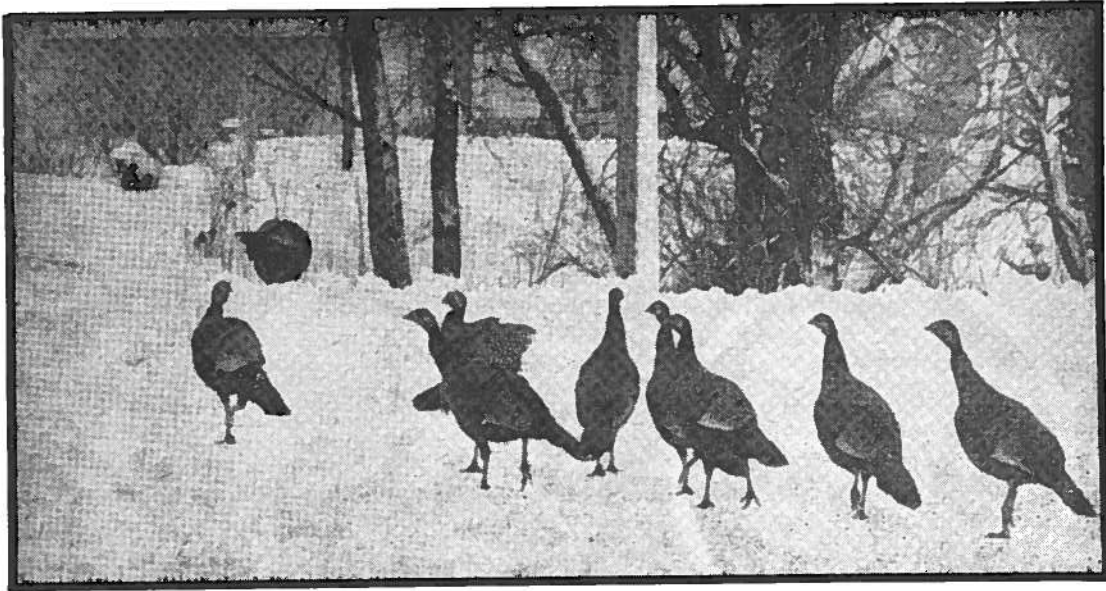
The Manitoba sportsmen who were present were interested, and sufficiently impressed to call a meeting at Morden a short time later to study the idea further. After hearing Mr. Jack Sobie from North Dakota give his presentation on wild turkeys, the group decided that the idea was worth pursuing further. An organizational meeting was held in Plum Coulee, a central location, attended by five Southern Manitoba locals of the Manitoba Game and Fish Federation, and it was here that Wild Gobblers Unlimited was born. The first President was Peter Kutcher of Plum Coulee, later followed by Andy Blatz of Morden, Marcel Timmerman of Treherne, Ed Manikel of St. Jean Baptiste, and presently Joe McMullen of Winnipeg (Seven Oaks). There was no guarantee that the introduction of wild turkeys into Manitoba would prove successful, or that even if the turkeys did survive the climate they would increase sufficiently to make a season on wild turkeys possible. What mattered was that there was sufficient optimism to encourage this small group to work together to try.



Wild Turkey Statue Marks La Riviere, Manitoba, Wild Turkey Capital of Manitoba.

Plans were made immediately for obtaining and releasing wild turkeys in Manitoba. Fourteen turkeys, in the ratio of one hen to one tom were ordered from a hatchery in Mandan, North Dakota. A release committee was established to find the best areas for setting the birds free. Methods of obtaining funds to pay expenses were considered. Each original member local agreed to purchase two birds. Membership fees were instituted, and decals were ordered so that they could be sold to raise funds. It is with some pride that Wild Gobblers Unlimited can claim that from the beginning the organization has been completely self-supporting. The sale of crests, buttons together with the organization of several raffles, in addition to the previously mentioned fund-raising methods have sufficed to provide Wild Gobblers Unlimited with all the necessary funds.

In September of 1958 the first sixteen turkeys (two were donated by the hatchery) were imported from North Dakota. After some minor problems caused by lack of knowledge of import regulations the birds arrived safely. Ten were placed in a shed at the Oakes farm south of Miami. These birds were released after a couple of days of acclimatization. The release was covered by the Press, and movies were taken of the event for future references and publicity. The other six were kept in captivity on a farm near Morden in order to obtain eggs for local hatching in the spring. These birds did not take kindly to captivity and did not survive, so this aspect of raising turkeys failed. This prompted Wild Gobblers Unlimited to concentrate from that time onward on other means of turkey propagation. The Oakes birds, however, survived the winter well despite blizzards, predators, and deep snow which covered food on the ground. They subsisted on acorns for which they scratched, elm buds, dried berries, and some grain from the fields where they found the snow not too deep, though offered food, they seemed to prefer to fend for themselves.



Wild Turkey Flocks Range Southern Manitoba.

The experiment seemed on its way when two young hens brought off small hatches of six and three birds respectively, though Wild Gobblers Unlimited had been told that year-old hens would not likely produce young. A number of these young managed to escape danger and grew to adulthood.

During the next three years another 108 birds were imported from North Dakota, but the ratio was altered to three hens for one tom. These were released in the Morden, Thornhill, Darlingford, and Manitou areas. While some of these sites did not prove satisfactory to the birds, for whatever reasons, others did at least temporarily. By the fall of 1962 the flock at the Oakes site had become so large that it was necessary to move some of the birds. About fifty birds were live-trapped in a wire cage and transferred to new areas at La Riviere and Swan Lake. Since some damage occurred to young birds during this trapping, it was decided to hold future trappings in the spring when the birds were more mature. Further trappings resulted in releases in areas such as Margaret, Glenboro, Brandon, and Virden, also Morris. Birds were now present all across Southern Manitoba from the Red River westward.

When, in September, 1975, forty birds were obtained from Kidder Game Farm in Jaynesville, Wisconsin, and released in the Roseau River basin and the Greater Winnipeg Water District near Shoal Lake on the Ontario border, the extent of wild turkey releases increased to nearly all of Southern Manitoba. Unfortunately some of the release sites were not satisfactory and no longer have birds in them. Possible reasons are predators such as raccoons and owls which catch turkeys in the trees at night, also skunks of two varieties; a four-legged kind which robs nests of eggs and a two-legged kind which poaches birds illegally, out of season. In some cases the birds just do not like the area and move elsewhere. A few birds have been lost to diseases such as blackhead, or have been killed by vehicles while crossing roads. The best areas for turkeys at present seem to be on the edge of the Pembina Valley south of Manitou and at La Riviere, also at Miami, though that area seems to have fewer birds now than a few years ago.



SUCCESSFUL TURKEY HUNTERS

Ken Schaak and Dr. Chandy Jacob of Winkler each bagged a turkey on the Dave Buchanan farm near La Riviere on opening day of our turkey season.

Wild Gobblers Unlimited has been blessed with good public relations from the start. Great interest has been shown in the project by many people in many places. There have been articles in various daily and weekly newspapers, also in some sports magazines. There have been occasional references during radio broadcasts, and one or two television interviews. Letters have been received from most provinces in Canada, as well as from other places. One French nobleman from Paris read of the project in the *Wildlife Crusader* (**Nobody has supported Wild Gobblers Unlimited better than Paul Murphy in the Wildlife Crusader. Thanks, Paul!**) This nobleman sent a donation to Wild Gobblers and expressed an interest in obtaining wild turkeys to start a flock near home. Despite problems with health regulations and other red tape, his persistence finally paid off -- in 1968 fifteen turkeys were flown direct from Mandan, North Dakota, to Paris, France to enable him to start his flock there.

With the passage of time and with nature taking her course it became evident that wild turkeys were taking hold in certain areas of Manitoba. There was, however, a problem. The ratio of toms to hens was far too large. There was a need to reduce the number of toms. Wild Gobblers Unlimited began to press the Game Branch of Province of Manitoba to establish a spring season for turkey toms. It was felt that this method had been successful in certain parts of the United States and that there would be little danger to turkey hens which would be nesting at the time, thus keeping under cover. At first such requests went unheeded. The Game Branch had for a number of years co-operated with Wild Gobblers Unlimited by giving permits to import birds, permits to trap and transfer birds, by placing wild turkeys on the protected list in Manitoba, also by field-checking the birds during the winter seasons.



Manitoba's Wild Gobbler Unlimited

FIRST WINNER OF

Doug Clarke Memorial Award

Man. Pres. Glenn Ellis accepts trophy from
C.L.U.F. Pres. Dennis Patteson.

Our congratulations to Wild Gobblers, first winners of the Doug Clarke Trophy, to be awarded annually to the Provincial Wildlife Federation with "The Most Outstanding Achievement in Wildlife Management."

Deserved commendation to present officers and executive but also an appreciative bow to those early pioneers — Peter Kutcher, Charlie Stevenson, Andy Blatz, and Ed Manikel, are a few that come to the mind of ...



WILD GOBBLERS UNLIMITED

The second recipient of Manitoba's Wildlife Conservation Award

Wildlife Director Richard C. Goulden presents the prestigious Wildlife Conservation Award to onetime presidents of Wild Gobblers Unlimited — Jack Dunlop, John Tkachuk, Bill Alsop, Andy Blatz, Peter Kutcher, Joe McMullan, Ed Manikel and Marcel Timmerman.

M. Guenot
La Sauvageonne
45-Sury-aux-Bois
France.

18th July 1969

Dear Mr. Blatz:

I received, with pleasure, your letter and for your information, between Amsterdam and Paris there are about 514 kilometers.

My home is situated approximately 120 kilometers south of Paris - this means that if you come to see me, you will have to travel more than 600 kilometers. Unless, of course, you prefer to come directly to Paris itself where we could meet - please let me know.

Please be good enough to let me have some information as to the birds we foresaw with Mr. Jack Dunlop to send me. He stated in his last letter that this could be effected during August.

Please advise as this is very important for me.

I thank you in advance and maybe I shall have the pleasure of meeting you in Paris.

Yours Sincerely,

Michel Guenot

It was felt by some that since the turkeys had become domesticated to some extent by entering farm yards during the winter and in some cases accepting food from farmers, they would be easily killed during a spring season and a general slaughter would result.

Some landowners on whose property birds were found felt that they would be over-run by hunters. Some farmers had developed a possessive attitude towards the birds, considering them as personal property. Many problems would have to be solved before a season of turkeys could be permitted. Wild Gobblers Unlimited worked on these. Then, a meeting was arranged to take place at La Riviere in December, 1976. At this meeting were representatives of Wild Gobblers Unlimited, the Game Branch, and the landowners. Wild Gobblers Unlimited presented a brief to the Game Branch, requesting a spring turkey season.

Reasons were given why a season was considered to be necessary. The main ones were the large surplus of turkey toms, and the need to make the birds wilder by giving them a severe fright, which hunting them would certainly do. The landowners were able to express their concerns. The Game Branch agreed to consider the idea of a season but required time to take further surveys and to work out the organization which would be required if a season were permitted. A later meeting was decided upon, with all parties prepared to do their homework in the interval.

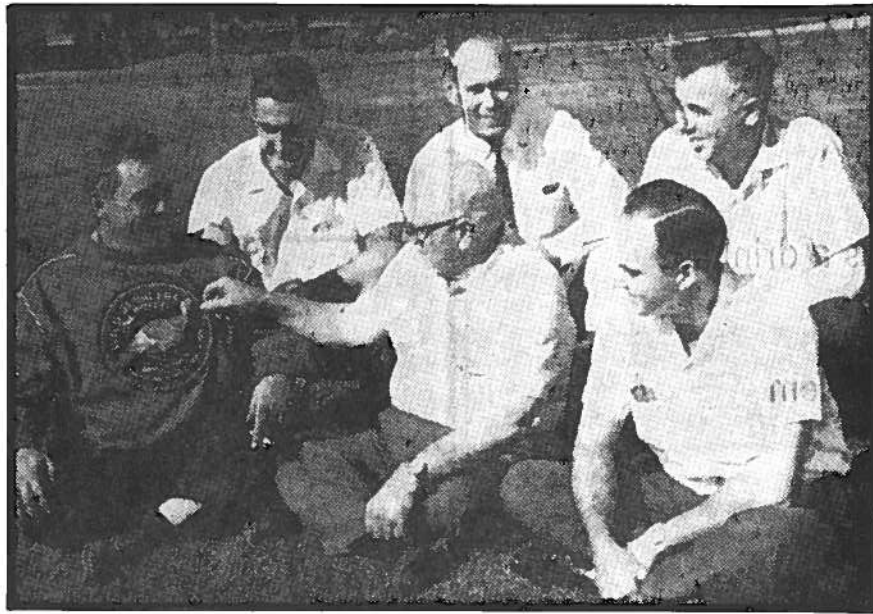
FIRST ARTICLE (1958)

The Rhineland Game & Fish annual banquet is set for Monday, Feb. 17, at the Altona Collegiate, and efforts are being made to get in proficient speakers from North Dakota as well as Winnipeg. We expect a game warden from North Dakota of the president of the Cavalier organization to be on hand and tell the audience something of U.S. management. The Cavalier boys have been conducting an interesting experiment, which is turning out quite well, the introduction of genuine wild turkeys into the district. Six were purchased and released a year last October, and a recent count (not too accurate as they range far from the point of release) shows 27 birds. They have eight more adult birds on hand which will be released in March. They get these birds from a hatchery at \$12 for hens and \$15 for toms. Park River, Walhalla and Grafton sportsmen have also made organized turkey plantings. The important thing as they see it, will unscrupulous kids with 22s and a certain type of adult with anything from a .22 to a shotgun, leave them alone until an increase warrants a regulated open season. Let's hope so, as the rough country south and west of Morden is ideal turkey cover, and it might be worth looking into.

On February 1, 1977, a second meeting was held at La Riviere with members of Wild Gobblers Unlimited, the Game Branch, and landowners present. Reports were presented regarding surveys taken of landowner opinions and concerns, also of how a season would operate if one were authorized by the Minister. It would be a limited season with licenses to be drawn for from among applications received. Restrictions would be placed on length of time permitted for hunting and number of hunters in a given area. Landowners' permission would be required, thus giving the landowner control over how many hunters were on his property at any time. Check stations would be set up for hunters to report to regarding hunting conditions, landowner relations, and success if any.

After a field check, held by the Game Branch which showed that there were sufficient birds, the Minister approved a short spring season. Thus after nearly twenty years, the ultimate aim of Wild Gobblers Unlimited had been realized -- the introduction of a new game bird into Manitoba and the establishment of a season for hunting it.

On April 14, 1977, a draw was held for licenses. Of 729 applicants 402 had their names drawn and received licenses. Nineteen turkeys were taken on the first day, with smaller numbers on succeeding days. A total of 55 birds were taken, a success rate of only 13.7 per cent. The slaughter feared by some did not occur. Relations among hunters, landowners, and government officials were quite cordial. Even those who got no turkeys felt that they had had fun while trying. The birds responded quickly to hunting pressure and became wary and hard to find, exactly what had been hoped for. The turkey proved to be truly wild when in danger, and was not an easy mark. The success of the experimental hunt,



Wild Gobblers Annual Picnic at Ex. Farm Here.

The annual picnic of the provincial Wild Gobblers Unlimited organization was again held at the Morden Experimental Farm, Sunday. Pictured above enjoying the afternoon program are, left to right, Oscar Van Ryssel past pres. of the La Verendrye Game and Fish in St. Boniface; Andy Blatz of Morden, president of Wild Gobblers in Manitoba; and Clarence Todd of the Selkirk Game and Fish. Back row: George Clavelle, president of the La Verendrye Game and Fish in St. Boniface; Pete Mitosinka, president of the Plum Coulee Assn., and Charlie Stevenson of Morris, past pres. of the Manitoba Federation.

and a government survey in the winter of 1977-78 which showed that there were sufficient birds, prompted the Game Branch to approve a second season in April of 1978. Results were almost an exact copy of those of 1977. At this writing a season for 1979 is being organized. Wild turkey hunting in Manitoba is on its way to being established.

No history of Wild Gobblers Unlimited would be complete without reference to some of the fringe benefits which have proved so valuable. Some of these include improved relations between hunter and landowner, also between both of these and the government. There has been an opportunity for meeting sportsmen from across the province, and working with them in a common, worthwhile cause. Friendships have been established. Wild Gobblers Unlimited has been a unifying influence in the Wildlife Federation of Manitoba. Who, having participated, can forget the camaraderie of the October banquets hosted by Labatts, or the picnics held in various places?

What other organization can boast a growth of five to forty club members, based on nothing more than the desire to bring something new to their home province of Manitoba, even though there was no guarantee of success and some predictions of failure? Wild Gobblers Unlimited has nothing of which to be ashamed, and a good deal of which to be proud.



This group of Wild Gobbler's Association members and members of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation was photographed at the Morden Research Station Grounds on Sunday afternoon. They were attending the Wild Gobbler Picnic which was attended by conservation-minded sportsmen and their families from many scattered parts of the province.

From left to right, front row: Henry Strong, Seven Oaks, Marcel Timmerman, Treherne; George Manchulencie, Labatt's representative, Glen Ellis, La Verendrye Game and Fish Association, Fred Grimshire, River East. Back Row: Jack Dunlop, Secretary Treasurer of the Wild Gobblers, Barney Johnson, Morden, Ralph Brown, Carman, Vern Spangelo, Morden, Gar Glays, President of the Manitoba Wildlife Federation and Andy Blatz, President of the Wild Gobbler's Association.

A few incidents here I think are worth mentioning. One is of a turkey hen that strayed from the straight and narrow way of life and got mixed up with a white turkey tom of the domestic variety. The result was a hatch of various colored off-spring, from dirty white to almost black. This was reported to the Game Branch and the four hens were condemned to death. Mr. Malaher (Game Comm.) issued a permit that these birds were to be shot. He agreed to keep everything legal, that the Mounties be called upon to do the execution. One night in November, a call was received from a farmer, that the hen and her brood were roosting in a tree in his yard. The Mounties were alerted and soon a squad car was dispatched to the scene. With the help of a spotlight, their car, they were able to dispatch of seven birds. This was the first legal wild turkey shoot in Manitoba. The birds were dressed and donated to Old Folks Homes in the area for a Christmas dinner.



In the above picture (left to right) are the provincial Game Manager, B. Webb, Andy Blatz, President of the Wild Gobblers of Manitoba, Vernon Spangelo, provincial Big Game Chairman, and Gene Bossenmeier, provincial biologist.



Mrs. Dunlop presents Andy Blatz with Dunlop Outstanding Achievement Award.

Sept. 17/83

Hon. Al Mackling Min. of Natural Resources presented first ever Wildlife Conservation Award to Wild Gobblers Unlimited, in recognition of outstanding contribution to wildlife conservation in Manitoba.

ASSOCIATIONS AFFILIATED WITH WILD GOBBLERS

(1979)

Brandon
 Deloraine
 Gladstone
 Lakeshore
 Lorne
 Morden
 Plumas
 Rock Lake
 St. James Legion
 Seven Oaks
 Transit

Brooklands
 Elmwood Legion
 Heather
 La Riviere
 Man-Tel
 Morris
 Plum Coulee
 Reynolds
 St. Malo
 South East Border
 Winnipeg

Carman
 Emerson Area
 Labatt's
 La Verendrye
 Miami
 Pembina
 Portage
 St. Boniface
 Selkirk
 Transcona
 St. Jo's

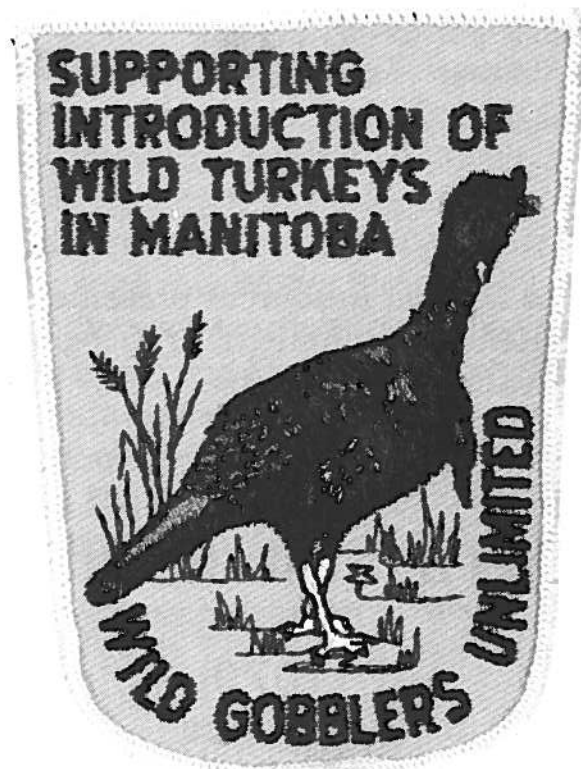
WILD GOBBLERS UNLIMITED

AN AFFILIATE OF



AND THE

MANITOBA **Wildlife** FEDERATION



We would like to acknowledge the Manitoba Wildlife Federation and in particular Paul Murphey Executive Director, and the Department of Natural Resources for their support and their devout commitment to our project. Without the support of the many members of Wild Gobblers Unlimited who have served on the executive and in any way have contributed to our project, we could not have achieved what we did.

- Peter Kutcher, Andy Blatz - Historians