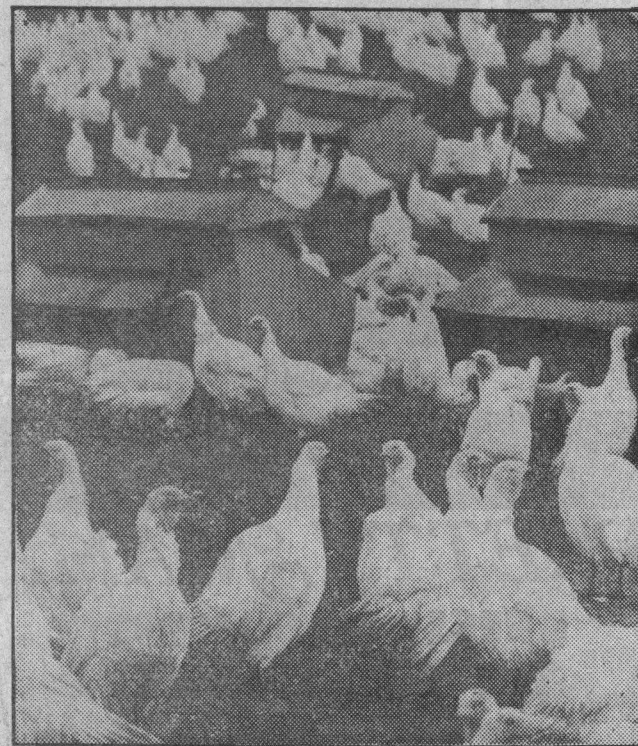


Tree 'n Sea Living

Travel/vacation _____ 8-9
Television log _____ 13
General news _____ 14
Sunday, Nov. 28, 1982 — Santa Cruz Sentinel

B



These examples of Meleagris gallopavo are at Simpkins' Bonny Doon ranch

Turkey tales for today and tomorrow





Jerome Simpkins home, home on the (turkey) range

Photos by Bill Lovejoy

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER
Sentinel Staff Writer

GOBBLE-GOBBLE, PURRR-TWEET and other salutations of the season — The turkey-eating season, that is. While Thursday was the bird's Big Day, between now and Christmas is when the humble *mellagris gallopavo* ceases to be merely a synonym for stupidity and becomes the culinary symbol of the season.

Here's a few thoughts to remember as you dine on turkey tetrazini, turkey soup and other turkey leftovers:

Turkeys in Soquel? You betcha. Turkeys used to be one hot agricultural item in Santa Cruz in the 1950s, sort of the Santa Cruz version of a 50s craze. "In 1948, turkey production was not considered important enough to list in the annual Agricultural commissioner's report," noted an article in the June 17, 1956 *Sentinel*. "Since then it has become an industry... of growing importance. In 1950 their value was rated at \$343,000 for 49,000 birds. Last year 135,000 birds brought a return of \$538,000."

Soquel and Boony Doon were the turkey-raising centers of the county.

Today turkey production is back where it was in 1948. There are three turkey ranches in the county, according to agricultural commissioner Jack Simmens. And these ranches produce turkeys for egg breeding. Jerome Simpkin's ranch in Bonny Doon, pictured above, is one of these.

So where have all the turkeys gone (long time passing?)

"Modesto," says Ralph Ernst, poultry specialist at UC Davis.

The cost of turkey feed and the difficulty in raising the bird has all but eliminated the small, independent turkey rancher from the market. Simmens noted that Santa Cruz does not produce its own grains so turkey feed must be trucked in from other areas.

"Turkeys are difficult to raise," says Ernst. They are expensive and prone to numerous diseases and predators. "You have to watch them like a hawk or they'll get sick. If anything can possibly go wrong, it will.

And what about the turkey's reputation as — well, stupid?

Ernst laughed. "Well, I don't think they're blessed with the greatest intelligence of any animal in the world."

How...dumb...are they, Ralph?

They're so dumb that they stampede at the slightest sound, crushing each other. "There's only so far they can run in the pen and they start to pile up on each other."

They're so dumb ranchers frequently put pebbles in their water trough to get them to learn how to drink. The turkeys peck at the pebble, and eventually get the idea that there's water there.

Domestic turkeys can't fly, and they don't have as much grace as other fowls, says Ernst.

Then there's the popular notion that turkeys are so dumb that they will drown in a rainstorm. Ernst says he has heard that, "but I've never seen it happen."

To get the taste equivalent to a fresh-killed bird, Ernst recommends consumers age the turkey by thawing it out in the refrigerator an extra three or four days longer than they normally would.

And where will Ernst get his turkey this holiday season?

"From the grocery store, like everyone else," said

Ernst. "It's not worth it to have to clean them."

Wild turkeys came to the rescue of scientists at an atomic research facility near Milan, Italy, according to a 1979 article in *Science Digest*. Scientists used the bird as a kind of feathered mongoose to protect them against the European asp. "You could hardly put down your foot without stepping on the poisonous snake," said the article. "The snakes...without natural enemies...multiplied at a fantastic rate."

Scientists rounded up about a thousand turkeys and put them to hunting snakes. Wild turkeys are tough enough to stand off dogs and cats and they love to eat snakes. The gobblers were treated just like real bodyguards, and signs posted warned of the dire consequences of poaching turkeys.

The article did not mention how successful the experiment was.

Or if after a year next to the nuclear reactors the birds could double as two-legged night lights.

For the average consumer, the holiday turkey is as removed as a food can be from its past existence as a living, flying domestic fowl. Turkeys come from stores, just like milk comes from containers, right?

"I try not to think about turkeys as ever being alive," confessed our Food Editor last week. "I imagine them as having come that way — you know, without the feathers, all ready for the oven, and with that little red dot that pops out when it's done."

This was not always the case, nor is it still for those huntin', shootin' types for whom the best meal is one they bagged themselves.

Wild turkey hunting is considered quite a sport, particularly that part of the country where people say "Y'all" and "over heah" and describe the the Civil War as The War Between the States.

It takes much skill. Wild turkeys (the bird, not the

guys you meet at singles bars) fly fast, hide deep in the forests and have acute sense of hearing and eyesight.

Here's what *Field and Stream* magazine has to say about bagging the wild turkey:

In the Midwest and South, where the birds are a native species, turkeys are among the wariest creature in the woods. The successful hunter cannot stalk them, like deer. He must flush them out.

First he makes a sound like an owl. Turkey callers suggest novice hunters remember the chant of the earless owl as a series of hoots and sounds like "WHO cooks for YOU...WHO cooks for YOU."

A hooting owl will often spur a tom (male turkey) into gobbling. If that doesn't work, try the sound of the crow, which world turkey-calling champion Ben Rodgers Lee describes as "the turkey's alarm clock."

Once the turkey has gobbled out his location, the hunter is ready to draw the bird out into the wild and into his gun sights.

And what lures thousands of innocent turkeys to their doom? The same thing that lures thousands of innocent young men and women to perdition every day. Sex.

Turkey hunters mimic the sound of a sexually aroused female turkey. Grown men, you understand, wearing rubber gators and carrying shotguns, set out in the wilds and make sounds like a horny hen.

The lonesome tom flaps his wings and runs to the call, saying the turkey equivalent of "Don't wait up for me, Ma — curfew shall not ring tonight"

That's when the hunter takes his full-choked 12-gauge shotgun with No. 4 or 5 shot and blows him into Turkey Heaven, which is known as "laying the bird down" or "putting the bird to bed" in *Field and Stream*.

Don't forget to remove the entrails. Bon appetit.