

# Black-And-White Turkey Vanishing

By W. W. EDGAR

If our Pilgrim Fathers were privileged to return for the anniversary of their first Thanksgiving Day, they'd be shocked to learn what has happened to the turkey gobbler—the bird they made a household word in America.

They'd find that the black and white speckled bird with the bronze hue and the long spindly legs that was the main dish of their first feast of thanks is just about extinct.

In its place they'd find a white feathered specimen with shorter legs, fuller breasts, less inclined to strut about the premises, and

much less picturesque in public view.

WHATSOEVER happened to the black and white speckled bird that always was the symbol of the period of Thanksgiving?

"The bronze (black and white) bird has been crossed out of existence," Lloyd Sharland, manager of the Gottschalk Turkey Farm in Plymouth, explained, "and you can blame it on man's intense desire for the white meat of fowl."

"For years," he said, "there were only a few varieties such as the bronze, Narragansett and bourbon red. Then, along about 1940 a

small white feathered bird came along, called the Beltsville white, that more nearly suited the table needs—and the trend toward white was on."

As he spoke, Sharland looked out over a flock of the latest specimen—the Rose-A-Linda breed developed in California—and explained that any one of the birds had more white meat than any of his other breeds ever had.

In THIS crossbreeding, so it was explained, the white bird developed a much broader breast — all white meat. This eliminated the pointed breast of the old black and white speckled species of Grandpa's day.

And so great has been the demand that an entirely new chapter has been written in the breeding industry.

The white birds have become so large a breed that it is now rather difficult to mate them—even in regular mating season—and artificial insemination is used.

"Can't let the hens sit so long on the nest any more," it was pointed out, "and the hen, now can be used more often during the season."

This stepped-up breeding has brought about a whole new trend in turkey raising and has virtually eliminated the hatcheries and brooding pens on the small farms of the land.

"We don't use our old equipment any more," the Gottschalk manager related, "we find it better to buy our chicks from the hatchery and

just feed them and watch them grow.

"AT THE MOMENT we have about 3,000 birds eating out there," he continued, "pointing to the large feeding grounds. It is a lot easier just feeding them than going through all the trouble and slow process of the old time natural breeding."

One can imagine how amazed the Pilgrim Fathers would be on learning of this latest twist.

It is a far cry from that crisp New England autumn and winter when they went hunting for food and came back with wild turkey.

From that day the American turkey has been the symbol of Thanksgiving—and it has had a most interesting history.

Because of the transition from wild country to the Pilgrim villages, the clearing reached the extent that the

turkey was forced to other areas and became almost extinct in New England about the middle of the 19th century.

In the new areas, the turkey became a domesticated bird and did a bit of world traveling.

When the Spaniards settled the lower east coast of the United States, many of the birds found their way back to the homeland in Spain.

Likewise, some of them were taken to England, and from there back to the United States.

ALONG THE way several varieties were developed, the most popular of which was what is termed the "bronze" species. This is the black and white feathered bird with the copperish hues.

Then, in 1840, the white feathered bird came along—with more white meat—and the entire industry changed.

Commercial flocks had their beginnings back about 1820, but the number was small and prices high.

Then, largely because of genetic and feed research and the new technique in raising, turkey production has become an important phase of U. S. agriculture.

Records show that more than 90 million turkeys were raised in the United States last year, providing about 8.8 pounds of ready to cook per person. And most of it is from the broad breasts of the white feathered birds.

Is it any wonder our Pilgrim Fathers would be shocked?



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