

A Pale Mutant Wild Turkey in Juvenal Plumage

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A RECURRENT pale mutant condition has been described in the post-juvenal plumage of three specimens of wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) from Baker County, Florida (Williams, 1964). Since then six additional specimens, partial specimens, or photographs of specimens representing the same condition have been obtained from Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. Eleven mutants of this type are now known on the basis of specimens or photographs from four counties in northern Florida and three southern states besides Florida. The purpose of this paper is to report the additional examples of this mutation and to briefly describe its expression in the juvenal plumage of a young specimen from northeastern Florida.

JUVENAL PLUMAGE

On June 28, 1966, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission Game Manager C. T. Lee obtained one pale-colored (Fig. 1) and four normal-colored turkey specimens from a flock in Bradford County, Florida. The five specimens appear to be siblings about 70 days old (Knoder, 1959) in mixed juvenal and post-juvenal plumage (see Leopold, 1943, for a discussion of the latter plumage).

The general coloration of the plumage of the pale female juvenal specimen is "smoke gray" (color terminology after Palmer, 1962) but the juvenal feathers are darker than the incoming post-juvenal plumage. Feather by feather comparisons among a sample of normal specimens reveals that there are more dark markings in juvenal feathers than in feathers that replace them. This difference in darkness between the two feather generations is maintained in the pale specimens; otherwise, there is little difference in color and markings between the 70-day old specimen and the older sub-adult specimens described earlier (Williams, 1964).

DISCUSSION

Whenever off-colored wild turkey specimens are mentioned, the possibility that they have resulted from crosses between wild

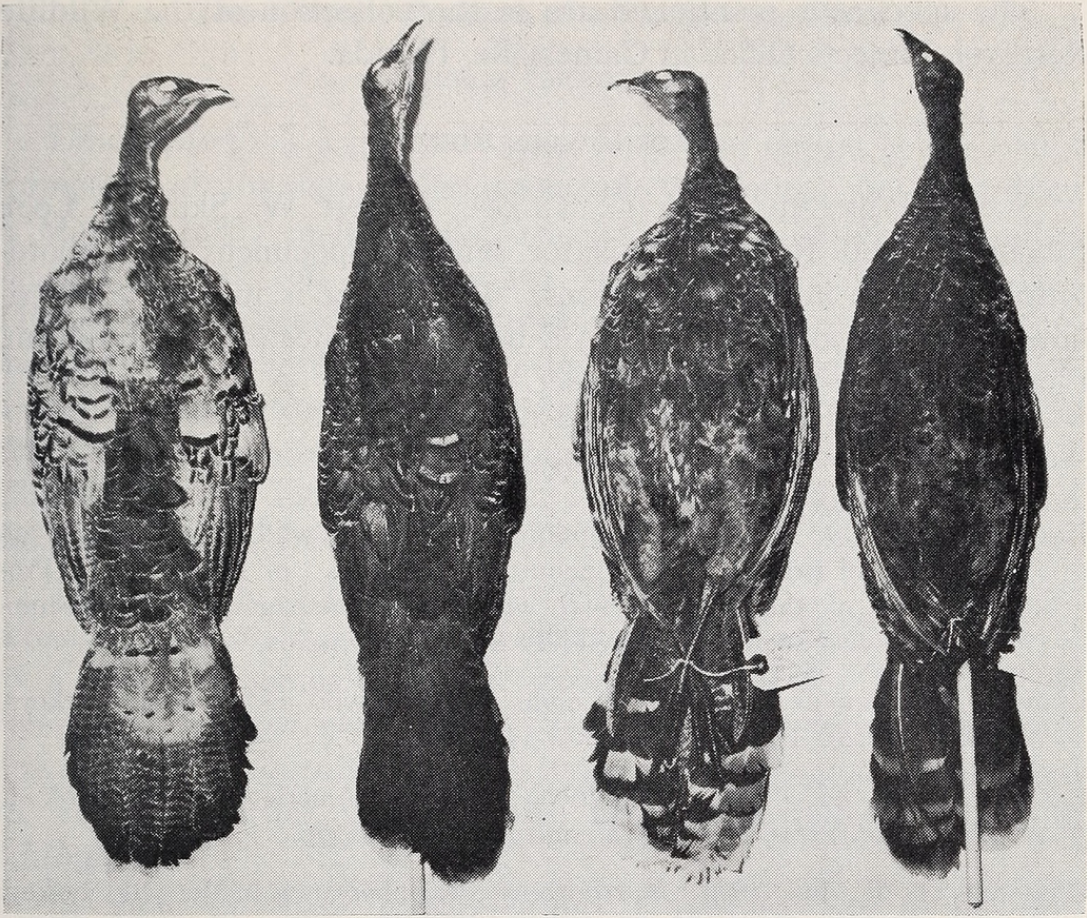


Fig. 1. Sibling female wild turkeys, approximately 70 days old. From left to right, dorsal and ventral views of pale mutant and normal-colored specimen, respectively.

and domestic strains usually arises. This question has been discussed before (Williams, 1964) and dismissed as unlikely because of the lack of evidence of such crossing between wild and domestic turkeys. Since that was written, the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission has produced in captivity a large series of specimens representing $1/4$, $1/2$, $3/4$, $7/8$, and full wild ancestry. The siblings of the 70-day old pale mutant, and the mutant itself except in respect to color, resemble the specimens of full wild ancestry closely but are easily distinguished from the hybrids by color, size, and body conformation. This indicates that the pale mutants are far removed from the generation in which any alleged hybridization might have taken place and lends further support to the belief that miscoloration in wild turkeys is a condition arising independently in the wild population and is not necessarily related to crossing with domestic turkeys.

The specimens mentioned are in the collection of the Wildlife Research Projects Office in Gainesville, Florida.

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