

VFC2023-0001 - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Turkey Project
2023-1010 - Interview with John Hall and Jeffrey Wallin
Interviewers: Andy Kolovos and Mary Wesley
Date: May 23, 2023
Location: Middlebury, VT

Andy Kolovos [00:00:00] Ok we're recording now. Today is May, it's May, right? May 23rd, 2023. This is Andy Kolovos.

Mary Wesley [00:00:11] This is Mary Wesley.

Andy Kolovos [00:00:13] And we're at the Vermont Folklife Center Studio in Middlebury, Vermont and we're here with...

John Hall [00:00:18] John Hall.

Jeff Wallin [00:00:20] And Jeff Wallin.

Andy Kolovos [00:00:23] Thank you guys for coming. So Mary and I are just going to kind of take turns asking questions. But let's, let's start...let's start here. Or where should we begin? Who's the first person to really talk about this? Who was the instigator?

Mary Wesley [00:00:38] And I'm sorry, I'm going to pause you. I think your folder is hitting the table, which is picking up on the mic.

Jeff Wallin [00:00:44] I am so sorry.

Mary Wesley [00:00:45] It's totally fine. I'm sorry to be so picky, but we just want to get a good, clear recording.

Jeff Wallin [00:00:55] John's still with the department. So let him go and I'll come in with where I came from.

John Hall [00:01:04] Yeah, okay. I started with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department in 1968 and doing outreach work with the Information and Education Division. I retired December of 2010 and got a phone call two months later to come back part time. So I am back with the department as a part timer. Enjoying it thoroughly. Jeff?

Jeff Wallin [00:01:40] Well, I went to the University of Vermont in Wildlife Biology. Worked for a wildlife professor there for the four years I attended college, who used to run the Waterfowl Division for the Fish and Game Department. His name was Bob Fuller. So I worked with him while going to college on the waterfowl project that he was on. So when I graduated a new position opened up with the Fish and Game Department—it was called Fish and Game at that time—in the waterfowl Division, and I was given that job in 1971 and was there until almost two years. In 1973 the biologist who was operating the wild turkey restoration program at that time left to take a job with the federal government, and I was asked if I would like to move up and take on that project, which I eagerly did, and ran the wild turkey program through 1983, at which time I left the department and went on my own doing wildlife consulting.

Andy Kolovos [00:03:05] This is unavoidable. We're here to talk turkey.

John Hall [00:03:10] Alright!

Andy Kolovos [00:03:12] I'm a dad. It, it happens. So can you guys share a little bit about...broad overview, the history of turkeys in Vermont and why they needed to be... Why reintroduction was necessary if we wanted to have them here?

John Hall [00:03:28] Sure. Wild turkeys were native to Vermont pre-settlement times. But by the 1850s, Vermont's forest cover had been reduced to about 25% of the state. In other words, the habitat for many wildlife species, wild turkeys included, had been pretty much eliminated. And that forest cover has now returned to the extent that the state is now about 75% forest covered. In 1968/69, we realized that wild turkeys might be able to come back to Vermont because the habitat had returned. So we embarked on a restoration project. And in 1969 and 1970, the then new turkey biologist we hired, Bill Drake, brought 31 wild, live-trapped turkeys from southwestern New York to Vermont. 17 went into the Pawlet area in 1969, and another 14 went into Hubbardton near Castleton in 1970. That's...shortly after that Jeff joined the department and did some amazing work live-trapping and transferring some of those original wild turkeys eastward and northward in the state. And in my mind, Jeff is principally responsible for the original restoration work that was done. And we are so thankful for that effort because it was a tremendous amount of work. It took a lot of dedication. It took a lot of skill.

Jeff Wallin [00:05:44] Well, I could add that one of the underlying driving forces for the restoration was a program that the department had on "put & take" pheasant hunting. Now, pheasants are not native. And it was purchasing game farm birds, releasing them for hunters to harvest. Very expensive. It's going to go nowhere. You're never going to establish a population. So the department, in order to get out from under it, kind of made a commitment to the sportsmen that—why don't we put our money into a program that can be self-sustaining.

Mary Wesley [00:06:31] Can I get you some water or anything?

Jeff Wallin [00:06:36] So that that's one of the driving forces that led up to it.

Mary Wesley [00:06:44] Yeah. Can you can you tell us a little more about what what "put & take" hunting is?

Jeff Wallin [00:06:52] Well, it's like fishing. Hatchery raised trout and they're thrown into the brook for fishermen to come and pull them out and catch them. And the put & take for pheasant was pretty much the same thing. Except from a hatchery, a fish hatchery, it comes from a poultry hatchery and they release them. Now a lot of states have been doing that with wild turkeys, trying to get the population established. [00:07:21] And there is a huge difference between a game farm raised turkey and a wild turkey. And these are not intelligent birds. I mean, they get a brain the size of a walnut. But the wild ones have zero curiosity. They...something's out of place. They're out of there. They don't put up with any immediate disturbance or whatever. But the game farm birds never learn that. And it's an inherent learning process from the minute that the birds are even developing in the, in the egg, it's the female is talking with it and it recognizes it and it's imprinting and they hatch out and these poults will, will follow the word of this hen in. I've experienced that using radio telemetry on these birds and it's...trying to find them a hen trying to count poults and I'm in the middle of a pasture and I know I'm right on top of them and I can't see them. And all of a sudden they catch the glint of the antenna off the hen. And I don't want to make

contact, eye contact, because it'll be all over. And finally, as I'm looking around trying to find the poults, I make eye contact and woomp, she stands up and just flies off into the trees about a couple of hundred yards away. And once she lands in the tree, she just goes "putt putt" and the ground just bursts all around me. 12 small poults that are just able to fly did not move an inch until they heard the female call them and then boom, they follow her. And that's the way they behave and that's the way they interact. [109.0s] So instead of just putting money into a pheasant program where the birds are purchased, released hunters shoot them, game over, they wanted something more sustainable. And that's when they went with the wild turkey program and pretty much how we sold it to the sportsman to give up that expensive put & take program.

Mary Wesley [00:09:42] I just...at that time do you know, was there, was there living memory of turkey...there being turkeys and turkey hunting in Vermont and was there a desire to see that return? Or who was leading that?

John Hall [00:09:58] [00:09:58]There had been no turkey hunting essentially for, well... [3.2s]

Jeff Wallin [00:10:03] [00:10:03]Over a hundred years? So you're not dealing with people who remember it and are excited about it and let's do it. [8.0s]

John Hall [00:10:11] [00:10:11]Right. [0.0s]

Jeff Wallin [00:10:12] [00:10:12]It was a totally new experience. [1.3s]

John Hall [00:10:14] [00:10:14]Zadok Thompson And he said when he wrote Natural History of Vermont in 1853, said the turkeys only were found sparsely in the southern part of the state at that time. And they disappeared shortly after that. So several generations of Vermonters did not see wild turkeys. And what was fascinating about the first modern turkey hunt in 1973 was observing how the hunters at the time had to learn how to hunt turkeys, and it was pretty fascinating. I remember one of the first successful hunters that opening morning in 1973 in Middletown Springs, Vermont, was a postal worker from Bradford who came dressed in casual clothes. He was not wearing camouflage clothing, which most turkey hunters will do today because she don't want to be seen, you know, by that turkey gobbler while you're out there hunting until he's within range. So hunters had to learn all over again about turkey hunting, [85.1s] and Jeff you...

Jeff Wallin [00:11:41] [00:11:41]And it's very difficult. That first season, there were 579 permits issued and only 23 turkeys were harvested. [10.6s] Success rate is very low and this is also reflected in the, [00:12:04]the trapping of these birds and the state of New York gave Vermont permission to trap wild turkeys. They weren't going to do it for them because this it's so labor intensive. And it's all right, you send your people out here to catch them and bring them back. And it took all winter long for Bill Drake to catch 17 birds, bringing them back two at a time or five at a time. The next year he spent all winter long and he captured 14. He leaves the state. A new biologist comes in who catches nothing his first winter. His second winter he works all winter long and I believe he captured 16 or 18 birds. And he moved those to the town of Rockingham. Then I come along and spend the first winter of 1974 and catch nothing. They, it's a labor intensive process of putting this net on the ground with cannons and it's 30 feet long and you got it coiled back and it takes hours to set it up. And these birds come out to feed at the crack of dawn. So you're going to have this in place. You're going to be out there waiting for them. They come into your bait, hopefully, and you shoot this net off. Well, if you've set it up the day before and you

get inclement weather overnight, your net is frozen to the ground and boom, you fire it, nothing happens. Or you have to camouflage it because if the birds see anything out of place boom, they're gone. So it's very, very difficult capturing these things. And until we develop a whole new system, and this was shooting the net out of a plywood box, and I built this plywood box to stuff the net in and came up with a means of deploying it in the air. And we had to go from cannons to rockets. And we had no money. We couldn't buy nets to fit the system. We had to use the nets we had. We had to make our own rockets. We had to scrounge the federal government to get the, the chargers that we put into these rockets and so forth. But it was a system that we could set up in 20 minutes. So now you get birds on beat. You know that next morning you can get them an hour early, get everything set up, get it camouflaged, sit in your blind, they come out, boom, you shoot it. And we go from catching either nothing for a year or catching only 14 to 17 birds a year. Now we capturing over 100 birds a year and this is what opened the door for us to start rapidly spreading these birds around the state, moving them on the east side of the Connecticut River Valley, as far north as Thetford. And they took off on their own right up to the Canadian border. They've been released on the West Side in Milton. Some were put in South Hero. That population didn't really do too much, but the Milton population went off. So we were able to capture 40 or 50 birds in a week, send them around. The state in New Jersey, says, "Gee, we'd like to get a population established. Would you be willing to give us some birds?" Well, it's now it's a reasonably simple thing to do and we don't have to say, "All right, you send your own people up because we don't have the time to do it." And we started sending them throughout the northeast, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Maine even sent some to North Carolina where they wanted to put them up on the Blue Ridge Mountain range in the higher elevations, which they thought would be more suited than their low elevation turkeys, which they hadn't been able to get established. So it, Vermont was very instrumental in helping the entire Northeast redevelop this population. And of course, it spread naturally into Massachusetts and into eastern New York. And the population really grew and it allowed us to expand our hunting season at the same time. [280.7s]

John Hall [00:16:46] Jeff, you also sent birds to Ontario and West Germany, if I recall?

Jeff Wallin [00:16:53] That is true. I was not involved in the Ontario capture. That happened after I'd left the department, but [00:17:01] I think it was 1978 I was contacted by a biologist in Pennsylvania, and an enthusiast, his name was Palmer. I can't recall his first name, but he was CEO of Puma Knives and he had married a German woman and his wife's family were big into hunting and they had their hunting reserves and so forth, and they were very interested in getting wild turkeys established. So they contacted the Pennsylvania biologist who said: "Hmm, in Pennsylvania, they will not let you touch wild birds. They'll sell you all the game farmed birds you want, but they've never worked anywhere else. They're not going to work in West Germany." He says, "but I know this guy in Vermont, and I know they've been sending birds to other states. Let me give him a call." So I get this call from, Jerry Wunz was his name, a biologist in Pennsylvania. And he says, "I got this interesting program. We want to try and get them established in West Germany. Would Vermont be interested?" Well, at the time, our commissioner was Ed Kehoe, very colorful individual. And so I went to the commissioner and laid out this program on how they would...if we would trap them, they would transport them to Germany. And his response was, "Didn't Germany give us the brown trout? I think we owe them. Sure, let's, let's send wild turkeys to Germany. So we sent over there nearly 40 birds, I believe. [115.1s] And the unique thing about these birds is that the stress level is not great. And if you keep them over 24 hours, they will die, and they will die in your crate. You have got to release them within a 24-hour period. And we were able to do that, to trap them at

five in the morning, get them to Kennedy Airport, put them on a plane, and they were released the next day in West Germany. I sent them to the state of Michigan and they flew out of Albany and they were released in Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula, and had done quite well, from what I understand. So...

Andy Kolovos [00:19:43] I have a question for you about trapping turkey. You talked about it a bit, but I'm not a wildlife biologist. I'm not a hunter, right. Someone says to me, "Okay, your first job is you're going to go to New York and trap turkey." Like what was, talk to me about that first year and what was going through your head and what it was like.

Jeff Wallin [00:20:02] Well, that was that, that wasn't me. That was Bill Drake that first year. But John, was he hired...

Andy Kolovos [00:20:13] I meant specifically your first year.

Jeff Wallin [00:20:14] My first year.

Andy Kolovos [00:20:16] I'm sorry.

Jeff Wallin [00:20:17] Oh, okay. [00:20:18] I was scared to death. I mean, I didn't have a clue how to trap them. You know, I'd seen movies. The state of Missouri had put out a movie, and they showed a guy dumping bait in this huge, big windrow, two inches high in front of his net and birds coming in and pecking at it. And that right away kind of triggers you is the thinking, "Wait a minute, that bird is used to eating corn out of a trough, that's why it's coming in." Because I would dump a huge amount of bait on the ground and watch these birds come down and come to a halt, make a big circle around it and not even touch it. And the learning curve was incredibly flat. And it was a, you learn that you put bait out and if you can see it, you've put too much out. And you can you can, the wild turkeys really love manure spreading. And in the winter, big flocks would be attracted into fields where they'd spread cow manure in the field. And that, it sounds disgusting. However, it was rich with hay and grain and corn and sweepings off the, the barn floor. And, well, it's a good place to start to bait and catch birds. But it's an awful sight to have to trap them over, for obvious reasons. So I learned that I could lure them off...oh and then the state of Vermont says, "Nope, no more spreading manure on the fields." So there was all this fear, "Oh my God, what this is going to do the wild turkey population. Can it survive? It needs this to..." Well, it didn't need it. And but it was still coming to farms and it would go into big piles of chop silage or other manure piles. And, and I finally learned that I could lure them off of that over to a site where I wanted to, to capture them by just barely sprinkling this typical scratch grain that you buy at any agricultural store to feed your chickens. And you could leave this narrow trail and then you would bait a bigger area where your net's going to theoretically land. And you could bring them in to these sites. At any rate, you could camouflage, you try and camouflage where you set up is going to be and would use pine boughs. And this box that I made was, I think it was three feet wide and it was about 14-inches high and three feet deep. And we would put pine boughs in the snow where we're going to put that box because if the birds show up and all of a sudden there are pine boughs there and they weren't there yesterday, they don't care what's there to feed on, they're not coming in. So you got to have that set. And I'd put a twig, after I pace it off, I put a twig right where I'm certain the center of the net is going to be. So now I have a reference point for when the birds come into the bait that okay, I got a tight ball over that boom, I'll, I'll set the thing off. But if you didn't have those markers there the first time they came into the bait, then they would not come in the second time. And they typically would only come three times. And if you weren't ready to trap them on that third day, they're not

coming back. And they just keep moving and they'll keep a circuit and maybe two weeks later they'll be coming by again and you'd have another chance. So if you're baiting on a Friday and that's a--and they take you bait you, that's your weekend duty right there is catching those birds because you're not going to have another chance. [261.8s]

Andy Kolovos [00:24:46] You're both, do you both hunt? Or historically, have you, were you hunters Are you hunters?

Jeff Wallin [00:24:50] Use to be. Haven't hunted in several years, but...

Andy Kolovos [00:24:53] So you had a familiarity with firearms?

Jeff Wallin [00:24:55] Yes.

Andy Kolovos [00:24:56] [00:24:56]You used the word cannon. [0.6s]

Jeff Wallin [00:24:58] [00:24:58](nods)[0.0s]

Andy Kolovos [00:24:58] [00:24:58]Okay. (laughs) Can you describe this apparatus, the original apparatus? [2.7s]

Jeff Wallin [00:25:01] [00:25:01]Sure it was a tube, maybe two and a half inches diameter, about two feet long, slid down on top of another tube that was two and 3/8 in diameter. And it had a charge in the top of the post that was set in the ground, that looked like a 12 gauge shotgun shell. And it was just full of powder. And you slid the outer tube, big, heavy tube down over the top of it. [38.3s]

John Hall [00:25:40] [00:25:40]Steel tube. [0.0s]

Jeff Wallin [00:25:41] [00:25:41]Steel tube. And you had a ring on the top and you would connect the hook that was tied to your net. So this charge would go off and it would throw the steel pipe up in the air, which would yank the, the net off the ground and over the birds. And I have a great picture of the first time I was ever able to do that. This is 1974 where I already said I never caught anything, as this net went flying up all these birds underneath and not a single one caught because it froze to the ground. It went less than halfway up and then jerked back and boom, lost everything. The rocket system was actually a high pressure gas pipe, a two inch high pressure gas pipe. I ended up finding a place in Springfield, Mass. where I could buy the high pressure pipe, six inch nipples with end caps and then drill out an end cap. And then--I had no idea what I was doing. You know, a rocket just isn't going to go anywhere. If it's blowing through a straight hole you got to, you got to concave the thing and make that triangular cut in it so it gets the pressure to push your pipe off. So now we got these, these rockets that are about eight inches long, two inches in diameter, and they're filled with a nitroglycerin pellet. And inside a bag of these things is a small bag, plastic bag of gunpowder with a detonator in it that is ignited by a battery that you flip a switch and boom, it ignites the black powder, which ignites the nitroglycerin tablets, which creates a horrendous pressure in that, in that pipe and whoom off it goes. And these things would travel. You'd break loose one and lose it off the line and it's a quarter mile away, and you'd lose them, you can't find them. You'd hear something hit in the trees and you think, "My God, what was that?" And then you look and you see and your net's really not deployed and realized, "Oh my God, I lost the rocket." So you either got to go looking for it or you got to go back to your shop and build another one. So that's how, how those work. Yes. [156.5s]

John Hall [00:28:18] [00:28:18]Jeff, weren't there several rockets, not just one, used to propel the net outward? [5.2s]

Jeff Wallin [00:28:24] [00:28:24]Used three. [0.2s]

John Hall [00:28:25] [00:28:25]Okay. [0.0s]

Jeff Wallin [00:28:26] [00:28:26]With the three that I mounted on top of the wooden box and had angle Iron guides, a little truss that I'd set these rockets in. And of course the outer two were angled to spread out and the one in the center goes out. And while I was working on this system, I spent a good part of the summer and fall of '75 working through, trying to get it to operate in function. And boy in my back yard, it worked slick. It would shoot off and the net would be deployed in the air. Perfect. Come down 40 feet long, 30 feet wide, and I'd hit my target every time. And it was looking really good. So very anxious to get out there and try it. In the first, first baited group I had, John had helped me set up a camera and I had it on a tripod in the blind and I hit the detonator and hit the shutter on the on the camera. And I got this beautiful picture of this net halfway out, almost fully deployed, about ten, 12 feet off the ground, and 20 turkeys 15 to 16 feet off the ground. And they were gone. I mean, this goes in a fraction of a second. And these birds were off the ground and they beat that net in the air. Yeah, I'm thinking, "Well, that that went well." So it was a, it was a simple adjustment. Just raise my guides up a little bit, shoot it a little bit higher. And from that point on it was, we didn't miss. It was, it got us got the program going and we were able to move birds all over the state in the northeast. And that really made the difference when you look back at how Bill Drake struggled and how other states struggled and it really helped out and gave it a boost. And we were able to get the hunting seasons going very rapidly. For a brand new population, you know, to be harvesting your first harvest three years later and then I don't know, eight years later, you're, you've got spring season and fall season and you're hunting almost the entire state. It was a very rapidly moving program. [151.3s]

Andy Kolovos [00:31:00] [00:31:00]I don't mean to get stuck on this net deployment thing. [2.2s]

Jeff Wallin [00:31:03] [00:31:03]Yup. [0.0s]

Andy Kolovos [00:31:04] [00:31:04]So you went to college to be a wildlife biologist, not an engineer. You know, like. And that seems pretty complicated to me, right? So, like, what was your process in thinking this up? You know? [11.1s]

Jeff Wallin [00:31:16] [00:31:16]Well, I'd always been interested in woodworking. And when the folks at, in Pennsylvania were talking about, "Well you know, we think maybe we could shoot it out of a box or something." So I thought oh a box, let me make a box. How can I make this box? And how can I make a box that a 30 by 40 foot net that we already own is going to fit?" And that took more than one try. So it was a hit and miss program. I credit my supervisor for just turning me loose and letting me do what I wanted to do and, and get the program going. Even though I was more than a year into it and didn't have much to show for it. But we finally made up for that. [50.4s]

Andy Kolovos [00:32:10] [00:32:14]One last netting question. [00:32:14]So you describe like a beautiful, yet unsuccessful effort. Can you talk through like, the full scope of the successful

effort. Like deployment, capturing what the birds are doing, how you gather the birds together? Like the whole process. [11.9s]

Jeff Wallin [00:32:28] [00:32:28] We would, we would have a technician or two. The blind is three by four feet and four feet high—tiny little canvas tent. And it was incredibly awkward when you set it up to get in it because the ground's not level and it's a problem. So first thing I did was make a platform that the blind would sit on and I'd go find rocks or something to level it and keep it from teetering. And [30.1s] [00:33:00] back then in the seventies, you know, CB radios were a big thing, and we had a couple of technicians that were really into it and had CBs in their truck. And one of them got a handheld rig so we could be in the blind and could talk to him. But I tell you, I totally blew an opportunity to catch adult males. And you got to understand that they travel in different flocks. By summer, after the hatch, by late summer hens are getting together with their brood so you can get flocks from 12 to 20 to 30 gathering. And they move together all winter long. The adult males are in very small groups, only maybe 2 to 6 in a group. So when you have a successful capture, chances are they're either all female, or they're all female with a few immature males with it. So now you going to go out and you've got to find these adult males. And they're even more wary than immature birds that really don't care all that much. And I had a group of six nice toms coming in. And I took that antenna of the CB radio and stuck it through a hole on the blind to call the guys to tell them they're coming in, we're going to have them. And one of them looked straight at me and went "putt putt." And I think it saw the tip of that radio, and they turned right around and moop, never saw him again. And so I learned, do not communicate with your help until you need the help. And what'll happen is you shoot this net over, and particularly if you have a large bunch, I've caught as many as 34 in one shot. That was a huge group. [117.2s] [00:34:58] And with 34 birds they're holding that net up in the air and they're flying and flying and they'll lift that net three or four feet off. So you rundown to the net and you pick the bird up holding the net around and just twist it. So now you've kind of confined that bird and you kept the wings all tangled. So you run through and you, you tie them up as best you can, and then you slowly work one at a time, getting under the net, untangling the birds. They'll get their shoulder of the wing through the two by two mesh, and that's a problem. You got to work that loose and so forth. And we had, I had built these transport boxes so I could put eight birds in a box. And I learned that, well, I really had to separate them. So I put a divider in because they're climbing all over each other. And then I had a couple that split their head because it keep jumping up, so I had to line it with Styrofoam on the top. But we had these transport crates that we would, we would come in and put the birds in and immediately drive them to a site to release them. The National Wild Turkey Federation came out with their own transport cardboard boxes, big heavy cardboard that--wax coated--that when we're going to send these birds off to other states, they supplied these for us. It was free of charge and we would load those boxes up and sometimes we'd have to put two in a box when we had a large capture. But then we'd send them off to the other states, meet them, I met the folks in from New Jersey, met them in Albany and unloaded those. And we sent them to Rhode Island, met them somewhere down in Massachusetts, and I'd meet them halfway and they'd take the birds the rest of the way. [120.7s]

Andy Kolovos [00:37:02] When you brought them to Germany like that, you were the one who drove him all the way down to New York?

Jeff Wallin [00:37:05] Yes.

Andy Kolovos [00:37:07] What was that like?

Jeff Wallin [00:37:08] The worst time of my life. I get up at four in the morning. You trap these birds at, I don't know, maybe seven. I then had to go to a private veterinarian to have him certify that they were healthy. I then had to drive them to a federal vet to certify the certification of the, of the private vet. And these are all German forms that were sent to me. So I had caught them down in southern Rutland County. I had to drive to Montpelier to get to the federal vet. I then head down 91, picked this guy up somewhere in Connecticut and go to, go to Kennedy Airport and get back to his house at two in the morning. And it was it was not a fun drive. It was a very dangerous drive as I recall.

John Hall [00:38:15] Germany did, didn't Germany send Lufthansa Airline planes?

Jeff Wallin [00:38:20] We went no, actually it went on a regular Lufthansa commercial flight.

John Hall [00:38:28] Okay.

Jeff Wallin [00:38:29] Yeah, down in the travel hold. The baggage hold.

Andy Kolovos [00:38:36] That's just crazy to me. That's just crazy to me. Okay. I have background questions for you. Unless you have something more you'd like to share. I don't want to interrupt.

Jeff Wallin [00:38:43] [00:38:43] Well, there's one aspect of the German release. I called to say I've got them on bait. We think we're going to get them in the morning. They'll be leg banded and so that I can identify them when, when the vet looks at them. And immediately, "No leg bands. No leg bands." I said, "Well, what do you mean? I need identification." "The only thing we want is how many males, how many females? We have to know this, but no leg bands." So I pause and said, "Okay, what's going on?" "Well, Germany has a 30 day quarantine period for any animals coming in. And we know that these birds won't last 24 hours. So we have a whole farm load of domestic bronze turkeys that we are going to put into the quarantine pen, which is why we need to know males and females." And I'm thinking this is not good. What is going on here? I call a couple other people and in fact, the individual from Pennsylvania who set this all up, he wanted to come up and help trap. So he's up here helping me and he's saying, "Well, this is the only way they can get them in. Let's do it." So I call them, tell them what I have. The plane lands. They unload these boxes into a truck, send a different truck full of the exact same number of males and females that go into the quarantine pen. 30 days later, they go to pick them up. And the the German veterinarian running this quarantine pen says, "Oh, you got snookered by those Americans. These are not wild birds. Look, I can walk right up and grab it. This is not a wild bird. They pulled a fast one on you people. And they go, "Oh, no, what have we done? What has happened?" And they released them. And in fact, 1983, they invited me to go over there and--with this Pennsylvania biologist, he and I both went over and they drove us around looking for wild birds. And we saw wild turkeys everywhere we went. And he brought us to the Ministry of, Environmental Ministry or something and introduced us. And he ends up telling them this story. And I'm sitting there thinking, "We're going to get arrested before we get out of here." But they laughed and we went on our way. But it was an interesting aspect to it. [209.0s]

Andy Kolovos [00:42:15] That's hysterical. That's absolutely hysterical. Oh, it's perfect. That story is a perfect story.

John Hall [00:42:23] [00:42:23] We have had—since I started in 1968, several successful wildlife restoration projects. Ospreys, peregrine falcons, bald eagles, the American martin, the common loons are just some. But by far, the wild turkey restoration project stands out as a favorite for me. I mean, we, we went from zero birds to having approximately 45,000 birds today—wild turkeys in Vermont. They're here for all Vermonters to enjoy, whether we watch them, photograph them or hunt them. And I think they're a favorite with many of our folks who live here. Based on the phone calls and emails I get at the Fish and Wildlife Department today, people do love our wild turkeys. Last year, turkey hunting licenses totaled 15,000 for residents and 1600 for nonresidents. So a lot of people do enjoy hunting them. [67.4s]

Andy Kolovos [00:43:34] I just like the word turkey. Yeah, I like it here. Well, some background questions, if you don't mind. So. Oh, I thought I was going to ask you. Oh, so generally, like the range of wild turkeys and the pre contact period was the entirety of the Northeast. Is that fair? Yes. And the reason why the population was lost in Vermont wasn't overhunting. It was deforestation. Deforestation. It was it was what's I'm stuck on the word here. Habitat loss.

Jeff Wallin [00:44:06] Correct in that. And that's. Was the case throughout the Northeast, not just Vermont.

Andy Kolovos [00:44:13] So even like New Hampshire and Maine.

Jeff Wallin [00:44:15] Yes. Well, it's questionable. Whether turkeys ventured as far north as Maine, although they they likely went up the coastline, perhaps. I was driving to Bangor less last year. So birds up that region, you know, along the highway. I was really shocked that they've done so well so far north.

John Hall [00:44:46] But back to your question, we need to keep in mind that in the 1850s there were no hunting regulations at all. So in addition to the lack of habitat, hunting basically was unregulated. The Fish and Wildlife, Fish, Fish and Game Service back then had not been created. So there were no regulations to control, you know, the take of of wild turkeys.

Jeff Wallin [00:45:12] The deer population went the same the same way. Yeah. In fact, Vermont imported deer at one point.

John Hall [00:45:21] So many other wildlife species we have today were either as zero population or nearly so because of lack of habitat. And, you know, no hunting regulations. We carefully regulate the hunting of all of those species that are hunted today to make sure that their populations are sustainable in relation to available habitat. And that's. That's a basic, key element of what we do biologically.

Andy Kolovos [00:45:55] Well, this is somewhat off topic question, but I'm curious if you guys don't know the answer. In Vermont. Specifically, when did hunting really shift from sustenance to recreation and sport? I mean, maybe you can answer it, but it's, you know, it's like 1850. That was if people were here hunting, right? That was.

Jeff Wallin [00:46:20] Well, if the population's gone, it's not going to be providing much sustenance. And even, you know, like I said, the deer population was cut way off also. And yeah, the sheep, on the other hand, were everywhere in this state cover every mount--I think Burlington was one of the leading exports of wool, you know, back in the late 1800s.

So this sustenance probably shifted from wild animals to domestic animals in the early 1800s.

Andy Kolovos [00:46:57] Yes. Saying I've not heard much about people eating mutton. Yes, interesting question. Like the older interviewees we have, some of them are. People do talk about sheep, but they only talk about wool, not meat. And that was the commodity, of course. But, you know, anyway, I didn't mean to get into that. I'm just like, wow, that's interesting because this notion of hunting as a hobby. Right. As a price. Something you need to do. Even if there were people who did, of course, supplement food with it is interesting to me. Yeah, but a bit off topic. Sorry about that.

John Hall [00:47:23] The, the first hunting regulations really came about in the late 1800s and then rapidly built in the early 1900s. Regulations on hunting, you know, the species we have today have evolved ever since then, and they continue to evolve again with the basic goal of making sure these populations remain sustainable going forward.

Andy Kolovos [00:47:55] I have one last weird question, though. What do you all think of turkeys? You know, you've spent a lot of intimate time with turkeys.

Jeff Wallin [00:48:05] What do I think?

Andy Kolovos [00:48:05] What do you think of turkeys? You know, like, what have you learned from them? What's your takeaway from time with them? What do you appreciate about them?

Jeff Wallin [00:48:13] Well, you got to respect their wariness and the fact that they they want no part of you and they--anything anything out of the ordinary in their history. And this is what a lot of hunters learn the hard way, that you you sit there with your gun up and ready when that bird comes in its sight, because you cannot have any movement that bird can pick up. They, they claim that they can see that a clock is running by looking at the hour hand in the same amount of time you can see that it's running by looking at the second hand. Now, how you prove that, I have no idea. But that's the, the eyesight that these birds supposedly have and they're just so keen that's incredible.

John Hall [00:49:09] They, they are a fascinating species, though. I watch them in the field below my house, my place in East Montpelier, and they will roost, they'll be up in the trees at night. And I've watched them on occasion as they approach down through the field, as they approach the woods. They will fly up to the trees. One day after a coyote attempted to catch them as they got close to the woods, they seem to learn to, in in days and evenings after that, they've seemed to learn that they had to actually fly from further out in the field. They would not approach the woods any longer, you know, in those days after that initial attack. So they, like Jeff said, they are extremely wary. They're fascinating, they're fun to watch. And when they're displaying when the gobblers are displaying in the spring of the year, they're they're pretty humorous. And of course, the well, the turkey itself, originally from the wild birds, becomes an important species for us come Thanksgiving.

Andy Kolovos [00:50:36] You know, I'm just imagining, like a Moby Dick of turkeys. (laughter)

Mary Wesley [00:50:44] John, I'm curious. So I do I understand that you were in charge of the initial restoration project.

John Hall [00:50:54] No I was doing outreach work, so I was actually when I met Bill Drake in 1969 to help release those original birds. It was more specifically to get photos and 16 millimeter movie footage of the release. So, you know, my, my role all along has been doing outreach work, working with the public, working with the biologists, and try to keeping try to keep the communications flowing between the biologists and the public.

Mary Wesley [00:51:30] Yeah, I think so. That's what I'm curious about is, you know, I hear there is this desire to create to create a sustainable bird population for sportsmen. But what, what were the other sort of feelings and desires or you why, what were other reasons and motivations for bringing turkeys back to Vermont?

John Hall [00:51:53] Well, we I think the same is true for any of these species that are native, that we have brought back the ospreys. I mean, when I started the last osprey nest we knew of at the time was up near Lake Willoughby in 1971. But after that, there were no osprey nests for several years. In fact, not until the late eighties did we start getting ospreys successfully nesting in Vermont again. Peregrine falcons, the same bald eagles, you know, with all of these species. Yet what was driving us was they were native. We knew we had habitat again. It seemed very logical that these species could come back if we simply gave them the help they needed to be here. And there were other organizations and private groups who helped who partnered with us. And we need to make sure we credit those folks the. Well.

Jeff Wallin [00:52:58] Well, the. I was working as a consultant working for Central Vermont Public Service in probably '85. And I was at their office in Rutland, and the engineer that I was working with comes in shaking his head and throws this letter down and says, "President just sent this to me." And says, "get her off my back." I look at it and it's a woman named Mary Zitterser (sp?) Who lives on Arrowhead Mountain Lake, and she's Austrian. Very heavy accent. And she can write English, but not all that good. And she sent this darling letter to the president saying, "You people got to do something." And he'd just been blown her off. And in this engineer says, "What are we going to do about this?" And I read the letter and I said, "The first thing comes my mind is go take a look at it and see what you can do. Because just think of the PR this could do for the company?" "Oh, we never thought of that. Well, I don't I don't know if they'll do it. I said, do you want to go talk to her? Yeah, go talk to her." So I go up there and this woman lives right on, lived right on Arrowhead Mountain Lake. She had a pine tree that like clockwork every Easter the first osprey would show up there and would then disappear. And she desperately wanted a nest to be built. And so I went back and said, "Yeah, she's got a perfect spot, you know, What would it take for you to put a bucket truck down there? And she wants you to cut off the top of this pine tree and put a platform. It's not a big deal. And I think you get you get a ton of mileage out of it." They go, "Well, I don't know I'll see if he'll do it." So he went to the president and the president. "Well, okay, if it'll get her off my back." And I think those are the first ones that we put up, I put on, on the island out there that they, boom, nested on immediately. And then we did several others all around that Arrowhead area and Green Mountain finally get into it and is doing doing a lot of work with it.

John Hall [00:55:47] Yeah. Green Mountain Power also assisted in putting up osprey nesting platforms, and that actually started in '86, I think. But--

Jeff Wallin [00:55:59] Green Mountain sent a lot with that bald eagle restoration to right? In Addison, didn't they?

John Hall [00:56:05] Yeah, we had a bald eagle program starting, that started it at us and we were putting young birds up in a platform to get these young eagles established in the area, and they eventually flew on their own. But we've had bald eagles nesting for several years now throughout Vermont. We were one of the last states in the Northeast to have nesting bald eagles in recent history, but they're doing extremely well now.

Andy Kolovos [00:56:41] I think I've seen them.

John Hall [00:56:43] Yeah.

Mary Wesley [00:56:43] Yeah.

Andy Kolovos [00:56:45] Well, to go back to Mary's question of <unclear> is, you know, the assumption now, of course, is, "Oh, we're going to reintroduce the species because it's environmentally important within a web of relationships..." And stuff like that. Like, were those sorts of motivations present in the late sixties or...

Jeff Wallin [00:57:07] Oh. I'm going to say, not a driving force because the Fish and Game Department, at that time, was totally funded by sportsman licenses, and that was the driving force. And it...since that time, I mean, non-game at that time didn't even exist. Non-game biologists or something didn't even exist in the department or the Agency of Natural Resources. And it was, if you can do it with your license sales, then do it. And to reintroduce non-game species probably would have been difficult being funded purely by sportsmen. But since then, things have changed dramatically. And that's why all these other programs with peregrines and eagles and so forth of has taken off because it's a lot broader picture now.

John Hall [00:58:17] The wild turkey, however, the wild turkey population helps support many other species within the state. For example, bobcats, foxes, coyotes, fisher, raccoons, skunks, all benefit from turkeys. So, I mean, we've actually seen in the past few years an increase in the bobcat population, and that could be in part due to the support of the turkeys.

Mary Wesley [00:58:56] Do you mean that they benefit, like biolog--like as with turkeys being part of the ecosystem?

John Hall [00:59:03] Turkeys, because they're here provide food. Turk--turkey eggs.

Jeff Wallin [00:59:11] It's a prey.

John Hall [00:59:14] Turkey eggs are a favorite food for raccoons and skunks. And this will cause—I mean, Jeff you could talk to this a little bit more—re-nesting on the part of the turkey hen very often. I mean, I see, and many other Vermonters have seen tiny turkey poults appearing in late July. And that's because, the hen turkey originally failed with at least one nest and had to re-nest again, being more careful about where she placed the nest.

Jeff Wallin [00:59:58] Yes. The telemetry work that I did was looking at that re-nesting and so forth and I also learned that I wanted to examine the nest, but to locate the nest with the transmitter, you'd walk through and you'd go right to where the turkey was and you eventually are going to flush her off the nest and you can pick that up with the reception that you're getting. And I learn that okay, do not go to the nest because domestic

dog, raccoon, something that's following my scent and I lead them right to the nest. And what's almost as bad is walking in, realize that okay, I suspect the nest is right here. She's gone. I'll come back after she hatches and turn around and walk out the path I came. Well, that's just as bad, because now you've created a scent coming in that dead ends. So now this animal roams around, and we have a destroyed nest. So then I learned that, okay, you come in, you note where it is, and then you keep walking and make a big loop around. And, you know, don't just go back the same route and don't go to the nest. And that made a big difference. But they do, once if they have lost their nest, they will attempt to re-nest.

Andy Kolovos [01:01:39] When you would go looking for nests, what time of day were you out?

Jeff Wallin [01:01:43] Middle of the day. Yeah. And, and the other interesting aspect that I had like a dozen transmitters on hands and they were all on Snake Mountain.

John Hall [01:01:56] And that's in Addison.

Jeff Wallin [01:01:58] In Addison. You see it right out your window perfect. And I would keep track of them because I wanted to do the nesting study. So I wanted to know where they were and I'd drive in there. And on Route seven, south of Middlebury, a beautiful view, and I could pick them up from there and just sit in the truck, go through my lists. You know, they're all there. And then one day they're not there. That's because they're on the opposite side of the mountain. You go over. Yep, they're all there. And then on a specific day in early April, they disperse. And it's not one bird just walking off and going somewhere. They were gone. All 12 of them were gone. They were there the day before. They're not there this day. Where are they? And drive around the mountain. Can't find a single one of them. So I came up with a system of putting the antennas on wing struts of an airplane, and we then located them that week in Bristol, in East Middlebury, up towards Mount Philo. They just, boom. The population just split. They no longer together and they were all on their own building a nest. And it was very surprising that they they do that in a heartbeat. Just one day, their next day they're not.

Andy Kolovos [01:03:31] How much of that stuff was known before you started tracking that turkey behavior?

Jeff Wallin [01:03:39] I couldn't find anything about that. The it was relatively new, the whole study because the population was just coming back. There's a fellow at UMass, Bill Healy. He he was doing a lot of nesting work in West Virginia with it. But it was all just going on at that time. It was all just being undertaken in the in the seventies, early seventies.

Mary Wesley [01:04:18] I'm curious to hear more about the the public perception of, of the reintroduction. You know, I grew up in Addison County, and I can't imagine not seeing turkeys in the spring. And but you're saying that there was probably nobody who remembered them even being native. If you weren't a wildlife biologist, you wouldn't even miss them, I'm imagining. So how how did you talk about the program publicly?

Jeff Wallin [01:04:46] Oh, my God. The interest here was phenomenal. I mean, they particularly after the first hunting season and chapters of the National Turkey Federation started springing up in each county, and turkey calling contests were being held. I averaged 2.5 evening speaking engagements a week for over a year where they wanted to hear about the program. And, you know, I had to get help from John to put together

slideshows and all this stuff to talk all around the state. And then some. I mean, I got hauled up to the University of Maine to give a talk there, and the public interest was phenomenal.

Mary Wesley [01:05:44] And it's been mostly from hunters?

Jeff Wallin [01:05:46] Yes, it was at that time. Yeah. Yeah.

Mary Wesley [01:05:49] And that's something else I'm curious to understand, is the relationship between, you know, kind of conservation and hunting. You know, at first glance, just again, not not being in your field, the idea of reintroducing a species that doesn't exist here and then have having hunting alongside it. Help me understand.

John Hall [01:06:13] Well, the the first hunting season in modern times was in 1973. Keep in mind, we had just put out 31 birds in 1969 and 1970. That was a surprise to a few of us, even in the Fish and Wildlife Department, but also to many folks, you know, in the public. But the successful reproduction of these birds, not every year but in many years, when, when protected by regulation, enables them to sustain, you know, the very strong population that we have today.

Jeff Wallin [01:07:03] It--you can sustain a healthier population by harvesting birds before they go into the critical winter months. Also, it's called socio-physiological stress, and that's when the population gets high enough that it puts stress on the population. They don't nest. They will not successfully nest. If you drive around now and you see a flock of birds together out in the field. That shouldn't happen. And what that signifies is you've got an overpopulation. These females are just going to gather together. And I saw this in the early seventies. I used to do a tremendous amount of data collection, and I was having every hunter clipped the wingtip off the the bird. And I could tell from the wing tip whether it was male, female, juvenile or adult. So I get age ratios, I get sex ratios, so forth and so on. And we got to the point where here's a bird that hatches off 14 eggs in a season. So one hen has the potential of producing 14. So by fall, when we have a fall hunt, you should have, a high percentage of those birds harvested should be juveniles. Well, all of a sudden we look in and jeez, it's is only two juveniles for every adult hand that's harvested. That's not good. What happened to the other 12? And it's not that the other 12 died is just that many of the females never nested. So we had a very elaborate hunt in, I think it was '78 where, it shocked me, we took over 2000 birds in just southern Rutland county, northern Bennington county. It was a tremendously high harvest rate. And the the ratios were really bad, 2 to 1. And I'm thinking that, hey, I just devastated the population I've been working so hard to create. And are they going to bounce back? And the next year we did the same thing, took nearly 2000 birds, but now we're 7 to 1, 8 to 1. And it it stimulated that population to reproduce by getting rid of the overpopulation. So harvesting--you don't want an old population. You don't want all of your specimens in adult age and older adult. You need the recruitment coming up. And harvesting helps do that. I mean, a better example I could give you is going through deer populations and in winter habitat and why it's so critical to lower that population in the fall through hunting to get survival through the winter. And you can actually have a greater spring population through through reproduction and fauning by harvesting a larger number in the fall. And it takes the pressure off the habitat, particularly food. There's, there's virtually no browse available for them in the winter. And if you've got twice the number of animals they're looking to to feed off of that, you're going to have problems. And, and this was documented back in the seventies when we would collect the reproductive tracts, you'd, you'd pick up a roadkill doe and it may have three embryos and going to have triplets in good shape and that's not uncommon. February only

two of them are alive. One has died and an embryo in a in a adult doe is just like a fat reserve. And if that individual animal gets stressed. It will start absorbing the embryos back into its system. And now we get into March and boom, there's barely one alive. And it's you know, when it's finally dropped in May, it's got three strikes against it and it's going to get hammered by, even a fox will take a faun that's just been dropped. So if you can if you can keep that animal healthy by getting the population pressure off of it through the winter, you're going to have triplets instead of a single that's half dead. And hunting is is very important for those reasons. When you don't have the natural predators like the timberwolf and the mountain lion and so forth, that keeps the population down. I mean, it's like in Michigan, you know, how the the moose population and the wolf population winds up those down and they keep each other in balance. And we don't have that in Vermont. We don't have the natural predators to to do it.

Mary Wesley [01:12:58] You look like you're thinking something.

John Hall [01:13:02] No that's, that's true. But Vermont's wildlife species have increased in numbers in recent years. We have a lot more bobcats. We have the eastern coyote today. We have fishers. In fact, the fisher is another species that we brought back to Vermont. It's a native species, but it's another species that I could have mentioned earlier. We we don't have an existing population of mountain lions. Sometimes a young mountain lion will move into the northeast from a western state. Typically, it's a young male that's trying to find a new territory, but there's no existing population of reproducing mountain lions. The same is true with pure timberwolves. However, in our Eastern coyote population, we know that the animals we have today through DNA research, have some Eastern wolf ancestry in their background, which gives them slightly larger size than Western coyotes and an ability to take larger prey than a Western coyote. However, with their coyote ancestry, they are more adaptable. They're able to live close to people, live amongst us, live in a wide variety of foods and succeed. So, you know, here's a species that is evolving, even as we are here today and doing quite well. And that does play a role in deer predation to some extent, certainly with farms and in some cases in the winter when we have deep snow especially. But it's an animal that is different from the original large canid that we had. But it's more specialized living amongst us than that original catered was.

Mary Wesley [01:15:26] Well, it sounds like today Fish and Wildlife is really, really managing the the balance of species. And we in the region, we're very large scale.

John Hall [01:15:38] Yeah. Those of us who work here came into this because we are highly interested, just like most of the folks in the public who are highly interested. But the difference is we went to school, spent a lot of time studying this stuff and worked hard to get into actually doing it. And in the case of the wild turkey, we, we have Jeff, who played a huge role in getting that species restored, as well as some of the other turkey biologists who have worked for us, you know, over the years. But in terms of actually moving the birds and you heard him talk about the skill it took and the, the drive to get up actually before 4:00 in the morning, Jeff, to get out there so many times to do the trap netting and transferring those birds to other parts of the state. It took all of that to make this stuff happen. We do it for the people who live here today. We don't just do it for hunters. We do it because we all enjoy these species. We know they do to.

Mary Wesley [01:17:02] How does it feel to be looking back over 50 years and seeing the success of the program?

John Hall [01:17:08] Well, that's that's why I came today. I mean, one has to reflect when you've got that much time invested in this sort of work. Just as Jeff shared with you today. The effort that Jeff put into this and that other, you know, staff have put in to help know is worth it when we are now able to talk with Vermonters who are enjoying seeing these species, enjoying hunting them. We have many more people today doing wildlife photography as a hobby, and in some cases professionally, than we ever have in my time.

Jeff Wallin [01:18:01] Initially, you know, it was driven by funding. And when you funded by the sporting group, then that's what you, you're going to emphasize. Now that funding is totally changed and so has the programs, and it's far broader. I mean, when I back in the seventies, late sixties, seventies, there were five. Biologists, they were called game biologists and each one was in charge of a specific aspect. Turkey biologists, black bear biologists, deer biologists, fur bear biologists, you know, and waterfowl biologists. And those are all game oriented. And those were the only biologists and but that was the only funding. And now things have expanded. And I mean, I go into the Rutland Fish and Wildlife Department office and there's more people that were in the entire department when I was working right in that office now. So it's, it's really expanded and it you wouldn't have had all these other reintroductions species, had it not. So.

Mary Wesley [01:19:20] What have we not asked about? What are we missing?

John Hall [01:19:27] I think I think we've pretty much covered the turkey restoration effort.

Mary Wesley [01:19:33] I guess. Were either of you involved in the hunter development program? Or you're kind of describing a people that didn't really have the skill set of hunting turkeys when they when they first reappeared.

Jeff Wallin [01:19:47] Oh, yeah, I had to attend all those those meetings and those gatherings and turkey calling contests and so forth, and had to master the use of a turkey call myself and <recording cuts off>

John Hall [01:20:10] <recording restarts>Yes.

Andy Kolovos [01:20:10] Memorable birds. Individuals.

Jeff Wallin [01:20:16] Huh? Memorable instances? Someone calls and, let's say, "I just hit a, I just hit a turkey on route 4, and I don't know what to do with it." And I said, "Oh, no. Is it dead yet?" And I said, "Well, I'll be down and get it." So I'd go down and pick the bird up and have it for dinner. So we had those opportunities.

Andy Kolovos [01:20:59] Sorry to interrupt you, John.

John Hall [01:21:01] No, no. Her. I think we. Those of us who work in the department enjoy watching turkeys, photographing turkeys. I mean I'm--personally I photographed them at home a lot in East Montpelier, and we've used a lot of the photos. In fact, the cover shot on that 2022 season report was a photo I took, you know, near the house. So we we enjoy them as much as the, you know, members of the public do. They're just a fascinating species and it's great to have them back in Vermont again.

Mary Wesley [01:21:53] I was I was stunned to learn that they had you know, I, it just wasn't on my radar to imagine that they were ever not here. So they were just really enjoying this, getting to learn about this.

John Hall [01:22:06] I think that's one of the reasons I felt today's interview is important. So many people who live here today are young enough that they don't ever recall not seeing wild turkeys. They don't realize in most cases that the state was only 25, 25% forest cover in the 1850s, and it's the reciprocal now, 75% or more forest covered. And what a difference that change in forest cover has made in allowing, in bringing habitat back to allow these species, these many different species, turkeys being one of them, to exist again, you know, in Vermont.

Mary Wesley [01:23:00] Did you bring along some some artifacts?

John Hall [01:23:05] Yeah. Well, that's my diary from 1969, and that's the the first two birds that we put out.

Andy Kolovos [01:23:17] <unclear>

John Hall [01:23:24] February 28, 1969.

Mary Wesley [01:23:27] Would you read it? Because we--for the audio?

John Hall [01:23:34] I brought my diary today from 1969, and on February 28 I met Bill Drake in West Pawlet near the New York border, actually. And we put out the first two turkeys. They were both gobblers. And I met him again and again. Looking at the diary on March 4th and West Pawlet and we were able to put out five hen turkeys that day. And Bill went on to put out the remainder of the 17 birds that year in the same area. So yes, it's fun to look back on the project.

Mary Wesley [01:24:23] Is there anything memorable about that first day? I mean, it just feels so momentous to think about bringing, like the first two turkeys.

John Hall [01:24:32] Yeah. It was a cold afternoon and there was at least a foot of snow on the ground. And in fact, there were a few snowflakes in the air. And I couldn't help wonder how well this project would do, you know? Would wild turkeys, given our severe winters at that time, particularly being able to survive and rebuild a sustainable population again? They certainly have done that in spades.

Mary Wesley [01:25:18] I'm embarrassed to ask this, but a gobbler. Is that a Tom? Or is it just a turkey?

Jeff Wallin [01:25:26] It's. It's a male turkey. Same as same as a Tom. Okay. Yes.

John Hall [01:25:34] Yeah.

Jeff Wallin [01:25:35] And then it's more specifically an adult male turkey. A juvenile male turkey is referred to as a Jake.

Mary Wesley [01:25:48] Okay, so we have a Tom or a gobbler.

Jeff Wallin [01:25:51] No, no, Tom. They're all, they're both gobblers.

Mary Wesley [01:25:54] Okay.

Jeff Wallin [01:25:55] A Tom is a big old guy. A Jake is a young of the year.

John Hall [01:26:00] Female is a hen.

Mary Wesley [01:26:02] And is. Are there any other terms for a hen?

Jeff Wallin [01:26:05] No. I'm sorry.

John Hall [01:26:09] There should be. Perhaps.

[01:26:11] We'll work on that for the next 50.

John Hall [01:26:16] Yeah. That's yours.

Andy Kolovos [01:26:20] Oh! this has been wonderful. Thank you so much for.

John Hall [01:26:22] Those are my notes.

Andy Kolovos [01:26:23] Talk with us about this. This has been really fascinating.

John Hall [01:26:27] Well, it's. It's fun to see Jeff. I mean, I haven't seen Jeff in over 40 years.

Mary Wesley [01:26:33] Oh, my gosh.

Andy Kolovos [01:26:34] Really?

Jeff Wallin [01:26:35] Yeah, Pretty much.

Mary Wesley [01:26:37] A reunion.

Andy Kolovos [01:26:38] He was just a young, spry, highly energetic, dedicated employee with skills that were beyond what most biologists would have in terms of figuring out what would work for trap netting.

Jeff Wallin [01:26:57] <looking at photograph> There's is me, and there's Bill Drake.

Mary Wesley [01:27:01] And <unclear> Bill?

John Hall [01:27:02] Bill Drake was the first turkey biologist.

Jeff Wallin [01:27:06] This is 1975.

John Hall [01:27:09] We--I don't know if he is still with us.

Jeff Wallin [01:27:12] I don't know either.

Andy Kolovos [01:27:13] You know, I think, I'm trying to remember, Josh may have said that he's passed, but I don't know.

John Hall [01:27:18] Yeah,.

Andy Kolovos [01:27:18] He may have moved and that maybe--

Jeff Wallin [01:27:21] The fellow way to the left is Jerry Once (sp?). He's the Pennsylvania biologist that set up the German transplant.

Mary Wesley [01:27:35] Okay.

Jeff Wallin [01:27:36] And the second one over is Wayne Bailey, who has always been considered the father of wild turkey management. The first one that really put interest in managing a population. He's from North Carolina.

Mary Wesley [01:28:00] And what organization did he work with?

Jeff Wallin [01:28:02] He was with the state.

Mary Wesley [01:28:03] Okay.

Jeff Wallin [01:28:04] Department of Fish and whatever they call them, Fish and Wildlife or, yup--

John Hall [01:28:09] Pennsylvania?

Jeff Wallin [01:28:10] No, North Carolina. Jerry Once was with the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

John Hall [01:28:15] Yup

Andy Kolovos [01:28:18] Where did you both grow up?

Jeff Wallin [01:28:22] I went to high school in Massachusetts and went to the University of Vermont and never left.

John Hall [01:28:35] I grew up in Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire. My grandparents farms were in Maine, in New Hampshire, and I spent a lot of time on those farms. When I came here in January of 1968, Interstate 89 had not yet been completed, so I had to come to Montpelier on Route 40 from White River Junction. Seems like quite a long time ago now.

Mary Wesley [01:29:11] All right.