



With

Lit Mama Homeschool
Homeschooling with a Fire for Literature



American Turkey

The American turkey owes its fame, in part, to Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was one of the founding fathers of the United States, and he lobbied to make the turkey the national bird. Imagine the turkey's fame if Franklin had won that argument.

The turkey didn't need to be named national bird to become a national treasure. When he became a staple of our Thanksgiving feast, his popularity grew. Now turkeys are everywhere, especially in November—in our home décor, as fun crafts, and as a delectable part of our feasts. There's more to the turkey than just being a tasty main course, though.

The wild turkeys we see sometimes on country drives are not the same turkeys we serve at the Thanksgiving table. Those turkeys are domesticated—bred on farms for the sole purpose of eating. Wild turkeys are leaner than domesticated turkeys, and they have longer legs. This means they can sprint whereas most domesticated turkeys can't. In fact, a wild turkey can run up to 55 miles per hour.

Wild turkeys can also fly better than domesticated turkeys. Wild turkeys have been known to fly for up to a mile; a farm turkey can't even get off the ground once it reaches its full size. Farm turkeys are bred for large breasts and short legs—more meat, in other words. Their lives are very different from that of wild turkeys.

Native Americans had already domesticated turkeys before Europeans ever set foot on North American land. Colonists who came to the New Land in the 1500s brought domesticated birds with them only to find that the turkey was already an abundant food source among the natives.

The largest game bird found in this part of the world, wild turkeys live in the woods. They forage



for acorns, berries, seeds, and small insects by day and spend their nights in the lower branches of trees. The dark feathers of the turkey helps it blend in to its woodland home, a camouflage that helps protect it from predators such as bobcats, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes.

The male turkey is called a tom. He uses his beautiful tailfeathers just like a peacock does—to attract a mate. The tom will spread his feathers and strut about, grunting and gobbling and shaking the feathers in a shivering motion to get a female’s attention. The bare skin of his head and neck may also change color, from grey to red, white, or blue when he is excited or agitated. Maybe that’s why Ben Franklin’s thought he should be our national bird?

The growths on the tom’s neck that change colors are called caruncles. He also has a snood, or a flap of skin that hangs down over his beak, that changes color. The flap of skin that hangs down under his beak is called a wattle. Imagine if you had so many parts on your face that turned such a bright red every time you got excited or upset!

Toms also have beards. These are not really beards, but a different type of feather called a filoplume. These feathers stick out from the top of the turkey’s chest and can sometimes grow long enough to reach the ground. Scientists aren’t quite sure what purpose the filoplume serves, but they think it might help the turkey sense his surroundings.

The female turkey is called a hen and her babies are called poults. The hen can lay as many as 18 eggs in a nest under a bush in the woods. When the poults are hatched, they will stay with their mother for a year, even through the winter. They are unable to fly for the first two weeks after hatching, and the hen roosts on the ground with them during that time to keep them safe.

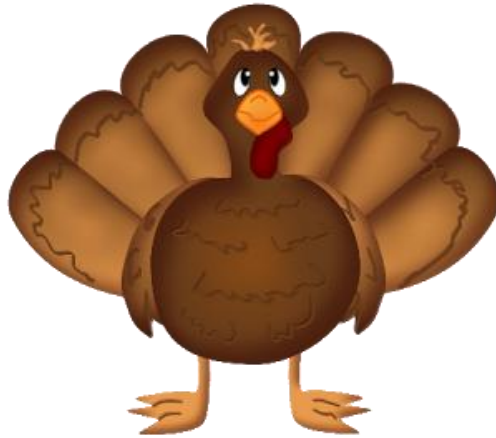
Hen’s do not gobble like toms do. Rather, they communicate with clucks and small chirping sounds. Like males, females have excellent vision. The eyes on the sides of their heads provide periscopic vision, meaning they can see objects not in their direct line of vision. A turkey can see 360 degrees simply by turning its head.

Since no turkey has teeth, they have two stomachs. The second stomach is called a gizzard and contains small stones the turkey has previously swallowed. The stones are called gastroliths. The gizzard muscles grind food against the gastroliths and dissolves the food entirely before it moves on to the intestines.



Turkeys, like all birds, are descended from dinosaurs. The turkey’s ancient ancestor could be T. Rex or Velociraptor. We know this because the turkey has a wishbone. The wishbone is actually formed by the connection of the birds two collarbones. This bone, called a furcular, braces the wings and acts as a connecting point for muscles. It serves as a spring for the wing, storing and releasing energy for the act of flying.

This Thanksgiving, enjoy your domesticated turkey if you wish, but remember that there are lots of cool facts about the wild turkeys who have lived in our land for thousands of years.



Turkey Vocabulary

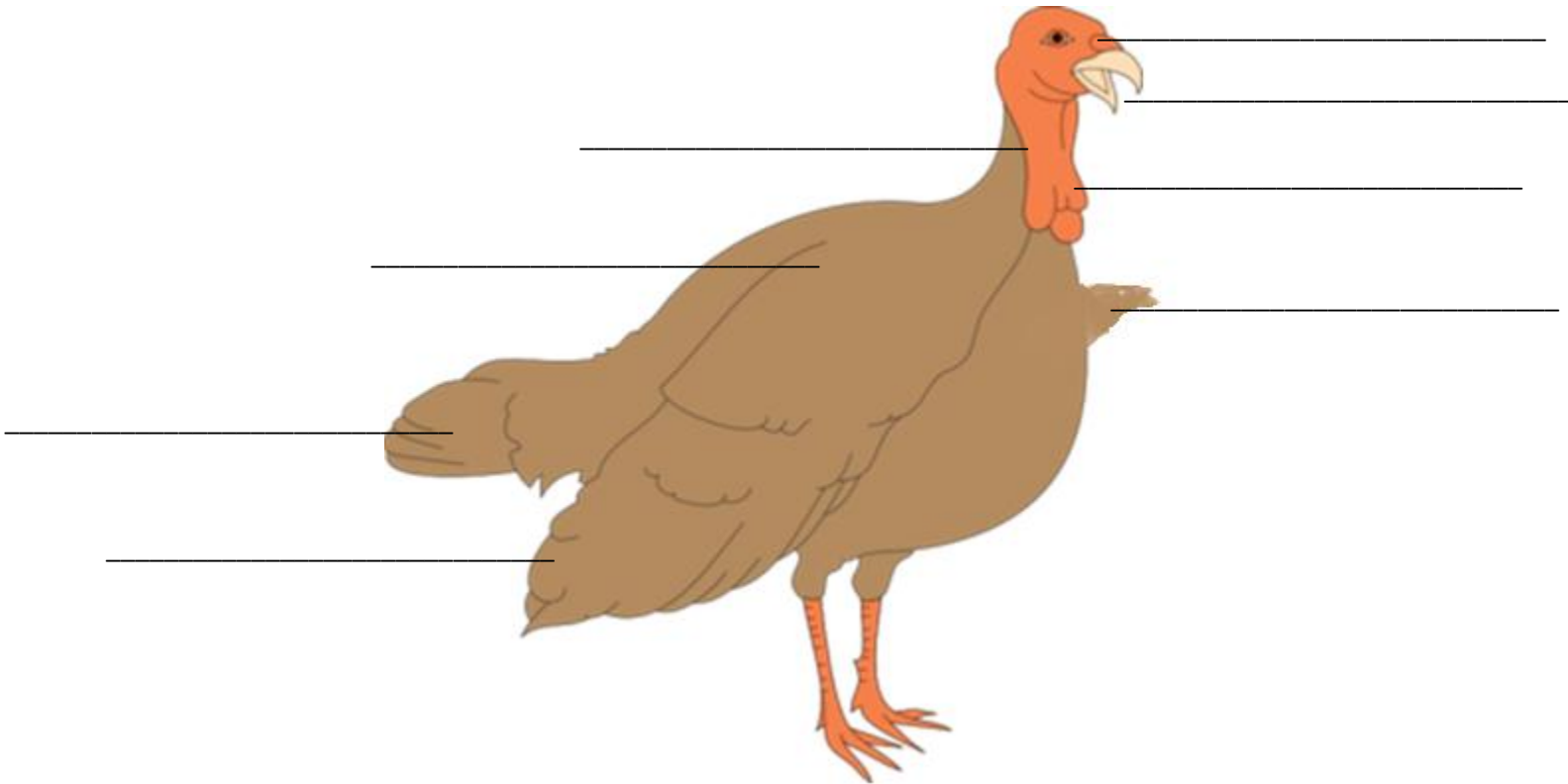
Match the vocabulary words with the definitions on the right.

Furcular, Poult, Filoplume, Wattle, Caruncle, Tom, Gastroliths, Snood, Gizzard ,
Periscopic

- _____ Growths on the turkey's neck that change color
- _____ Stones in the gizzard
- _____ Special feathers that look like a beard
- _____ Able to see objects not in direct line of vision
- _____ Male turkey
- _____ Turkey's second stomach
- _____ The wishbone
- _____ Flap of skin that hangs over the beak
- _____ Flap of skin under turkey's beak
- _____ Baby turkey

Label the Turkey

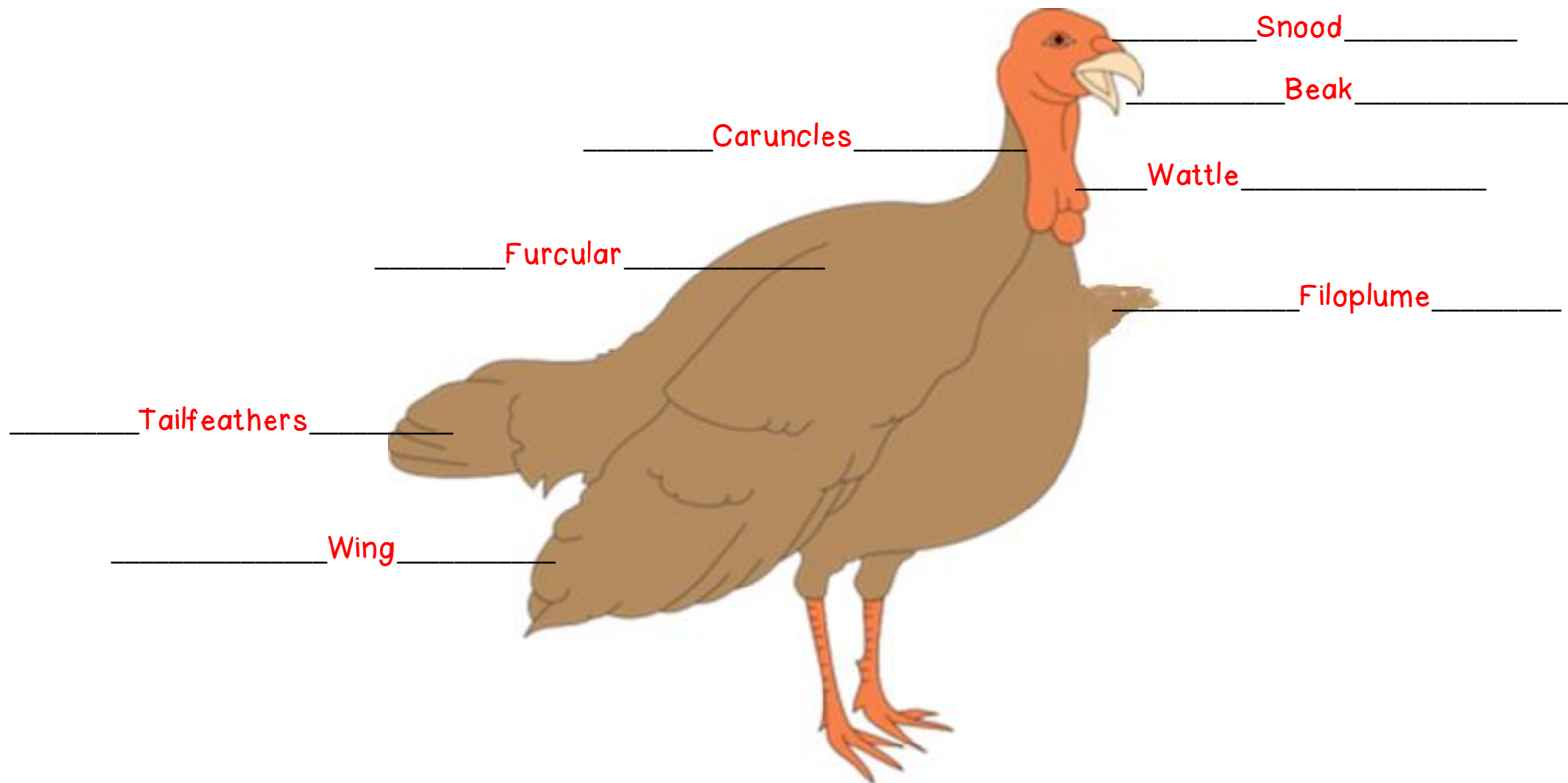
Snood, Wattle, Tailfeathers, Wing, Caruncles, Beak, Filoplume, furcular

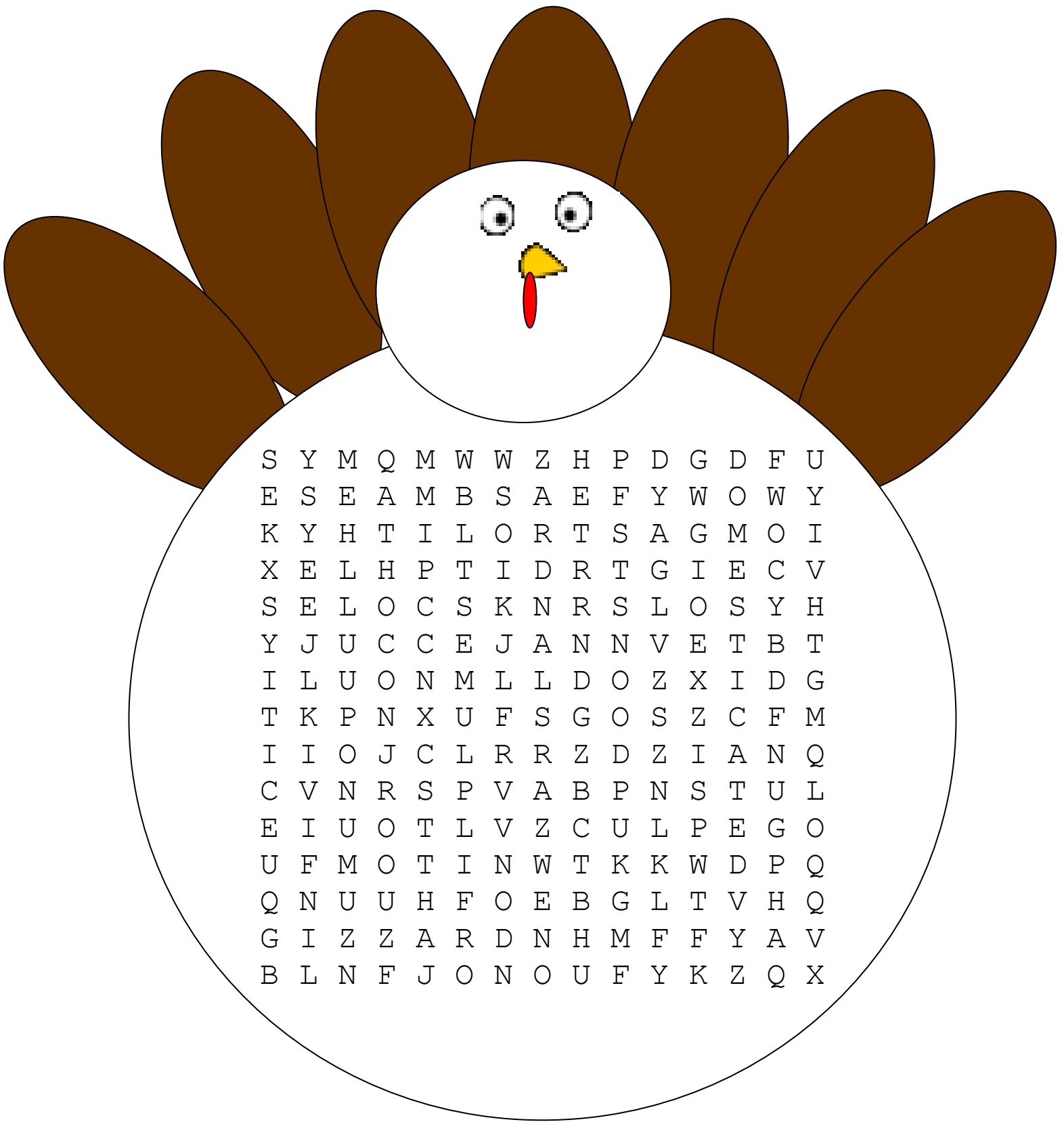


Label the Turkey

Snood, Wattle, Tailfeathers, Wing, Caruncles, Beak, Filoplume, furcular

Answer Key

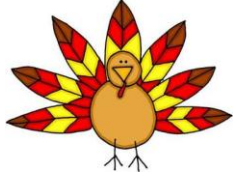




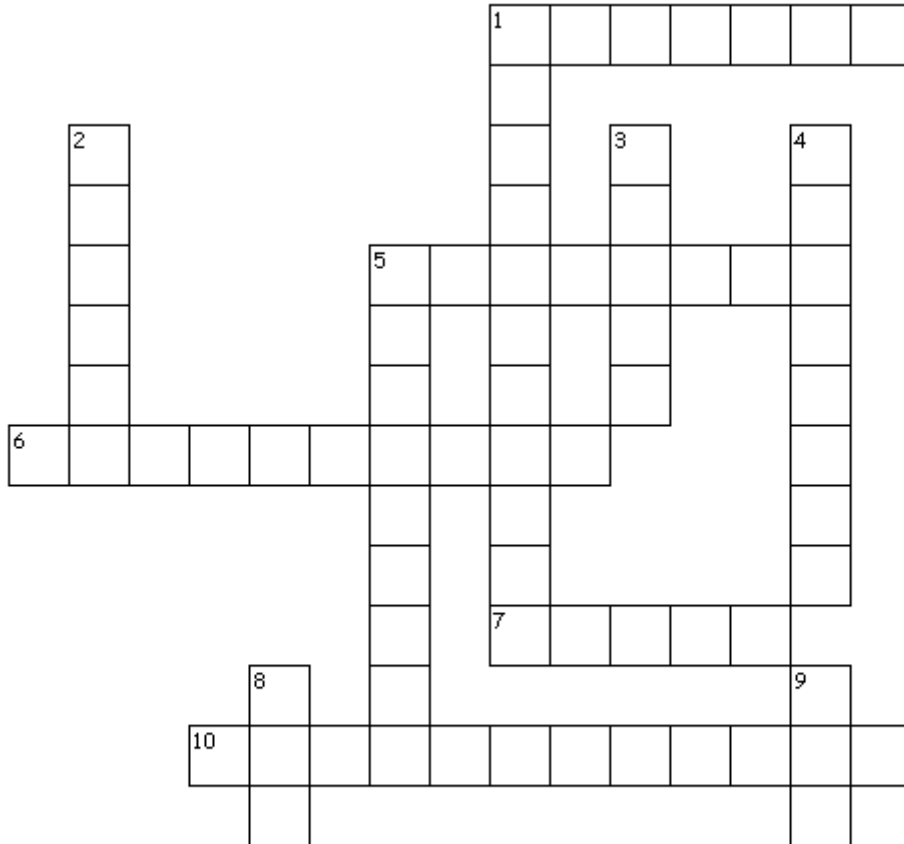
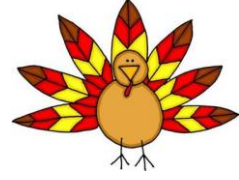
CARUNCLE
 FURCULAR
 HEN
 SNOOD

DOMESTICATED
 GASTROLITH
 PERISCOPIC
 TOM

FILPLUME
 GIZZARD
 POULT
 WATTLE



Turkey Crossword



Across

1. turkey's second stomach
5. wishbone
6. able to see objects not in direct line of vision
7. flap of skin that hangs down over the beak
10. bred on farms for the purpose of eating

Down

1. stones inside the gizzard
2. flap of skin that hangs down under the beak
3. baby turkey
4. growths on the tom's neck that change color
5. special feathers that resemble a beard
8. male turkey
9. female turkey

Fill in the Blanks

1. _____ lobbied to make the turkey the national bird.
2. Wild turkeys are _____ than domesticated turkeys, and they have _____ legs.
3. _____ had already domesticated turkeys before Europeans ever set foot on North American land.
4. By day, turkeys forage for _____, _____, _____, and _____.
5. The dark feathers of the turkey are _____ that helps protect it from predators such as bobcats, raccoons, foxes, and coyotes.
6. The bare skin of a tom's head and neck may change color from grey to _____, _____, or _____ when he is excited or agitated.
7. The hen can lay as many as _____ eggs in a nest under a bush in the woods.
8. Poultts are unable to _____ for the first two weeks after hatching.
9. Hen's do not _____ like toms do.
10. Turkeys, like all birds, are descended from _____.

