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## **TURKEYS A REGULAR SIGHT IN THE METRO PARKS**

Turkeys aren't just found on farms and Thanksgiving tables. Wild turkeys have made a remarkable comeback since being extirpated from Ohio in 1904. Now, they are a common sight within Summit Metro Parks.

Turkeys may be spotted at Liberty Park in Twinsburg, where visitors can not only see the birds but can enjoy learning and relaxing at the nature center (9999 Liberty Rd., Twinsburg). Summit Metro Parks Naturalist Joe Malmisur said the birds might be seen from the boardwalk portion of the 1.1-mile Ledges Trail, since the 3,000-acre park's mix of habitats – forest, fields and wetlands – in northeast Summit and Portage counties appeal to the big birds.

The wild turkey is the largest game bird in North America, ranging from 3 to 4 feet tall and weighing up to 24 pounds. Farm-raised turkeys, the center of a typical Thanksgiving feast, are twice the size of wild turkeys and usually cannot fly because of their size.

“A common misconception is that wild turkeys live only on the ground, but in reality they sleep in trees,” Malmisur said. “This behavior protects them from predators. There is always an appointed ‘sentinel’ that keeps watch, and will sound a full alert to the others in the flock if something is awry.”

Wild turkey breeding starts in early spring with an average clutch size of 12 eggs. About six to 12 hours after they hatch, young turkeys – called poults – are able to walk. Within about a day they can run and are able to peck at insects.

Less than 100 years ago, Ohio didn't have any wild turkeys due to farming and loss of habitat. Turkeys were trapped in other states by the Ohio Division of Wildlife in the 1950s and reintroduced, first in the forests of southeast Ohio.

The nature center at Liberty Park features indoor and outdoor displays that honor the site's natural and culture history. The center is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Admission is always free.

For more information about Liberty Park, call 330-487-0493.

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Summit Metro Parks manages 14,300 acres, including 16 parks, several conservation areas and more than 125 miles of trails, with 22.4 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail. Annual attendance averages 5 million visits.

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