



On a misty morning in Providence, three wild turkey ruff up their feathers to hold warmth against the chilly morning air. They walk out of a small woods to feed at the bottom of a large oak tree that stands in a park. A field cricket quietly hops out of the way, thankful that the turkeys are too intent on acorns to see him as a tasty treat. He hides in the bottom of some dry grass and milkweed. Later in the day, the sun will dry the air; the milkweed pod will pop open; and its seeds will float away on fluffy parachutes.

# Wild Turkey

Two hundred years after European settlers caused their local extinction through hunting and habitat destruction, wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopav*) were reintroduced to this area. Wild turkeys are ground dwelling birds that roost in trees at night. They need forests with clearings to forage in. Since reintroduction, the RI population has reached as high as 6000, but it has recently dropped significantly. Environmental scientists ask the public to help track turkeys by reporting turkey sightings to the Department of Environmental Management. Turkeys have a varied diet depending upon what is available. They eat leafy plants, grains, nuts insects and even small amphibians and reptiles. The best time to spot them is when they are out foraging early in the morning.

Wild turkeys grow a tremendous and varied range of **feathers.**

In addition to the use of turkey feathers for decoration, many Native American artisans of pre-colonial times wove turkey feathers into cloth to make coats and blankets. Turkey feathers are one of a few types of bird feathers that it is legal to collect. The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, written to prevent threats to wild birds by collectors and commercial traders, prohibits possession of feathers and other parts of most native North American birds - with no exception - even for molted feathers or feathers from birds who died accidentally.

Remiges are flight feathers of the wing.

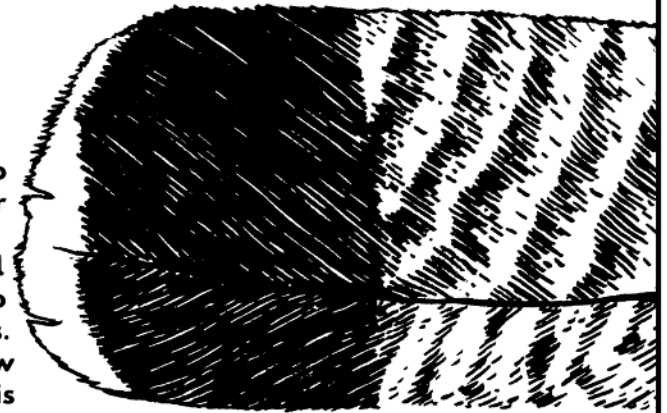
*Remiges*

## Milkweed



Milkweed (*Asclepias*) grows and flowers in neglected areas throughout RI. The plant is renowned as an essential part of the life-cycle of the Monarch butterfly. For a "weed", its flowers are astoundingly geometric and fragrant.

Shown here is the final stage of a milkweed life cycle. The dried gray-brown bumpy seed pods are packed with seeds. When they crack open, a tightly organized cone of seeds slowly bursts into a disarray of white fiber sails, and they float away.



Rectrices are flight feathers of the tail.

*Rectrices*

## Field Cricket

The papery sound of fall's last field crickets (family: Gryllinae) complement the smell of fallen wet leaves warming in the sun. Crickets who call are males looking for a mate. Even this late in the season, a few vigorous dudes are seeking to fertilize the eggs of a corresponding hardy lady. The female cricket can be identified by the long egg depositing spike (ovipositor) which they use to bury eggs underground.

