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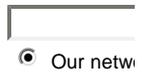
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Originally published Wednesday, November 26, 2008 at 10:35 AM

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## So what happens to turkeys after pardons?

At Thanksgiving, turkeys are in the spotlight, but not all of them end up on our tables.

By **LINDA LOMBARDI**  
For The Associated Press

At Thanksgiving, turkeys are in the spotlight, but not all of them end up on our tables.

One lucky bird is appointed National Thanksgiving Turkey, appearing at the White House and getting an official pardon from the president.

It's the high point of a turkey's career. But once he's whisked off the stage, what happens?

In recent years, the pardoned turkey and its alternate have had the good fortune to retire to the site of many a dream vacation -Disney World and Disneyland.

The first pardoned turkeys to go to Disneyland were Marshmallow and Yam in 2005. In his speech that year, President Bush joked that their retirement location had been changed because the turkeys "were a little skeptical about going to a place called Frying Pan Park," a historic farm park in Virginia that had been the home of the previous honorees.

Disney spokesman Duncan Wardle remembers it a bit differently. One Thanksgiving, chatting about the pardoned turkey over coffee, someone on his staff said, "Doesn't that make him the happiest turkey on earth? We should bring him to the happiest place on earth."

Last year's birds - named May and Flower via online poll- are currently living the good life at Disney World in Florida, where they were flown by a United Airlines flight that was renamed "Turkey One" for the occasion.

They served as honorary grand marshals of the Thanksgiving parade, riding on the first float. But once

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"Pumpkin", the National Thanksgiving Turkey, awaits his pardon today from President Bush.

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the holiday was over, like many of us, they had to go on a post-Thanksgiving diet.

"They arrived very heavy," says Matt Hohne, acting animal operations director for Disney's Animal Kingdom. "They were immediately put on our conditioning program."

Turkeys get the same attention to their nutritional and health needs as any more exotic species at Animal Kingdom. Excess weight is unhealthy for animals as well as people. For the turkeys, for example, it's bad for their feet to constantly support the extra pounds. Now that their weight is down, Hohne says, their activity levels are up

So they're healthy and trim. But how do you tell if turkeys are happy?

"We look for behavioral signs," says Hohne. "Are they inquisitive? Are they responsive? Are they eating well?"



A particularly good time to look for those signs is in training sessions. Training helps keep animals active and stimulated, and the trained behaviors help keepers manage them in a less stressful way. The turkeys go on a scale to be weighed, move from one enclosure to another for cleaning, and go into a crate to be transported, all without the stress of capturing them. They're rewarded in training sessions with mealworms, a crunchy treat that's a favorite of many animals.

The turkeys would no doubt argue that they're not to blame for their weight problems. One of only two bird species native to the Americas that have been domesticated, the turkeys on our dinner tables were selectively bred for many generations to grow fast

and get bigger than their ancestors who are still doing well in the wild.

Although the numbers of wild turkeys had declined by the early 20th century, they've made a comeback in many places, says Paul Curtis, professor of natural resources at Cornell University. Regrowth on land that was formerly used for farming has provided additional habitat for species that depend on forest, including deer, bears, and wild turkeys.

Curtis says that while wild turkeys are probably not as intelligent as social birds like crows, they have excellent senses of hearing and vision to detect predators - "It's very difficult to sneak up on a turkey," he says.

May and Flower have no worries about predators, of course. They don't even have to put up with roommate problems: When they didn't get along with the cow in their original exhibit, they were moved to their own private quarters.

Unfortunately, this means that they're no longer visible to the public. However, the turkeys to be pardoned this year will go to Disneyland in California, where you will be able to visit them at Big Thunder Mountain Ranch.

"In today's world of social media, they have their own fan club," says Disney's Wardle. "They have fans - I guarantee there will be people who will go out and look for them."

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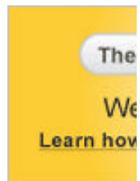
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