Rio Grande Wild Turkey Nest Predation in the Edwards Plateau of Texas

Justin Z. Dreibelbis,[1] Kyle B. Melton,[1] Ray Aguirre,[2] Bret A. Collier,[1] T. Wayne Schwertner,[3] Markus J. Peterson,[1] and Nova J. Silvy[1]

[1] Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M Univ., College Station, TX 77843-2258, USA.
[2] Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., Comfort, TX 78013, USA.
[3] Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., Mason, TX 76856, USA.

Nest predation is one major limiting factor for Rio Grande wild turkeys across their range, and positive identification of nest predators can assist managers in making sound management decisions. As part of a continuing research project between Texas A&M University and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department evaluating the reproductive factors responsible for differences in population dynamics of Rio Grande wild turkeys in the Edwards Plateau (EP) region of Texas, we used motion-sensor digital cameras to document nest predation events. In 2006, we placed cameras on 21 active RGWT nests, of which 13 captured photos of predation events. Nests with cameras failed, either from predation or abandonment, 90% of the time (19/21). The failure rate for nests without cameras was 84% (21/25). During the camera study, we observed 2 multiple predation events by multiple predator species and 1 partial predation event where the hen resumed incubation of the remaining eggs and successfully hatched the nest. We will discuss nest predation rates observed in our study areas and the effect these rates might have on the differing population trends within the EP region.