

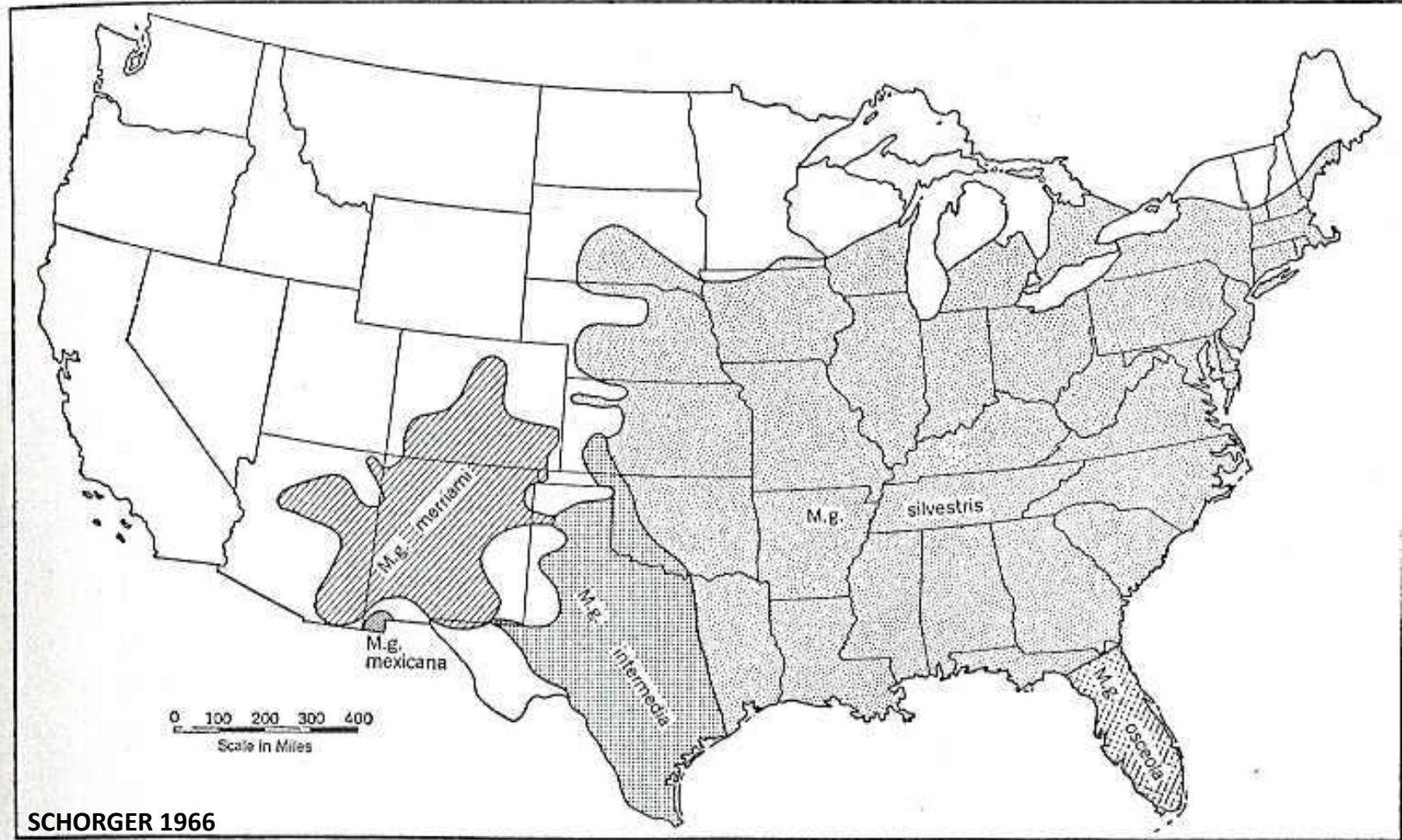


MASSWILDLIFE

# Wild Turkeys in Massachusetts

David Scarpitti  
Wildlife Biologist

# Pre-colonial turkey distribution

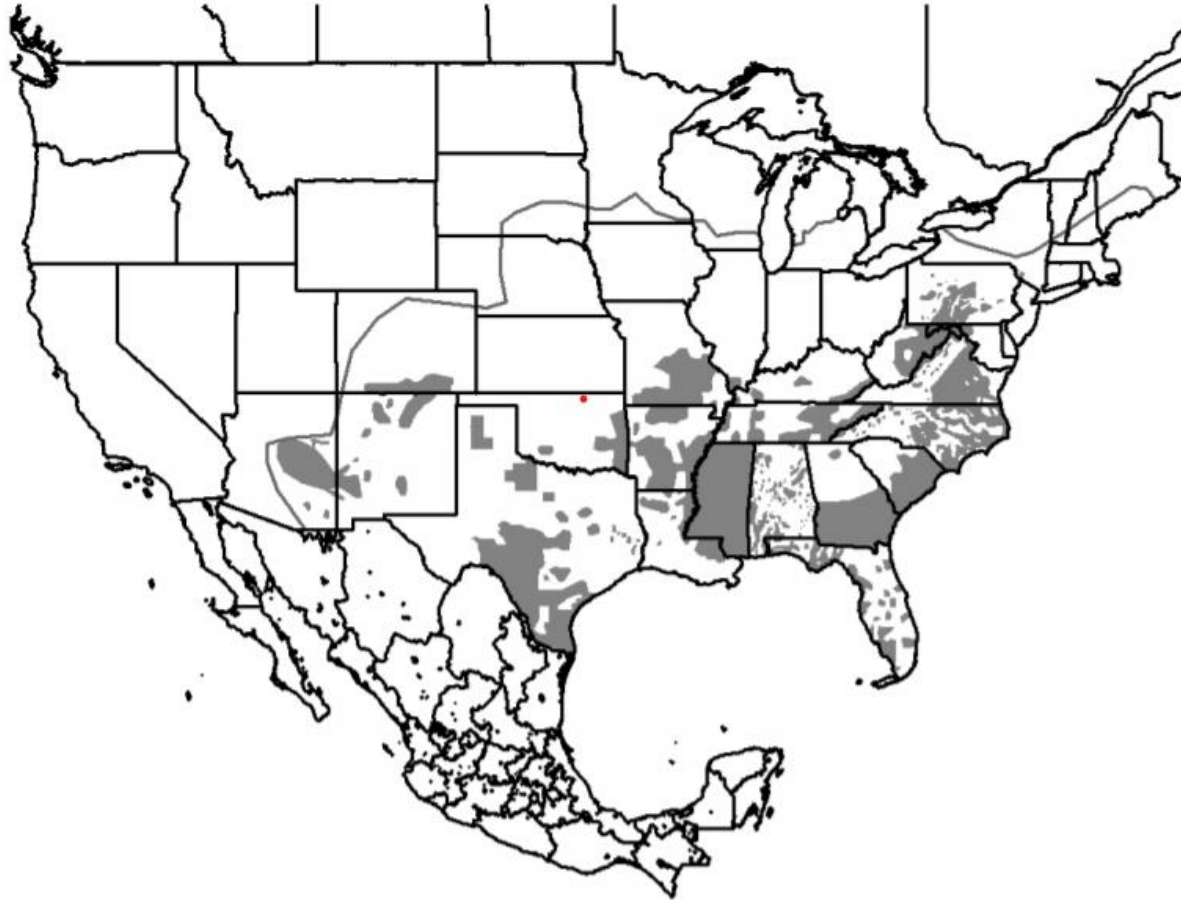


# Statewide habitat conversion



© HARVARD FOREST

# Nationwide turkey decline

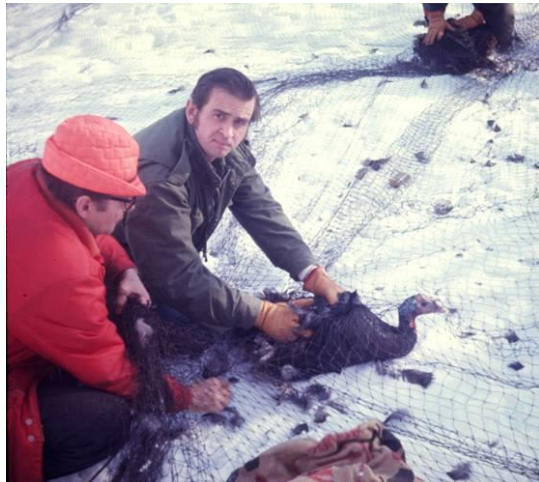


# **Decline of turkeys in MA**

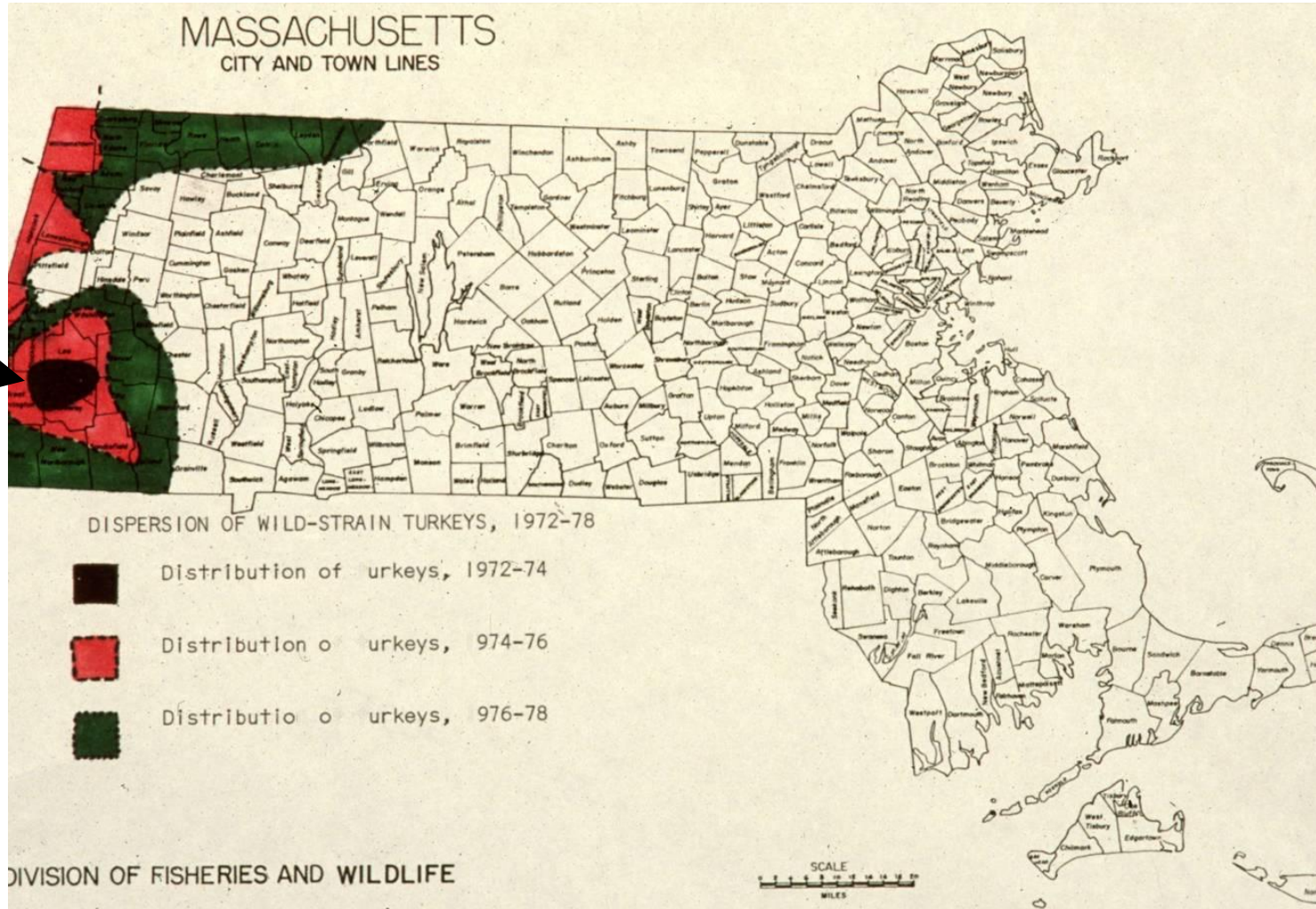
- **Unregulated harvest/subsistence**
- **Dramatic changes in habitat/land use/human population**
- **By 1850 turkeys were extirpated from MA**
- **Several failed restoration attempts occurred up through the early 1970's.**

# Restoration Success!

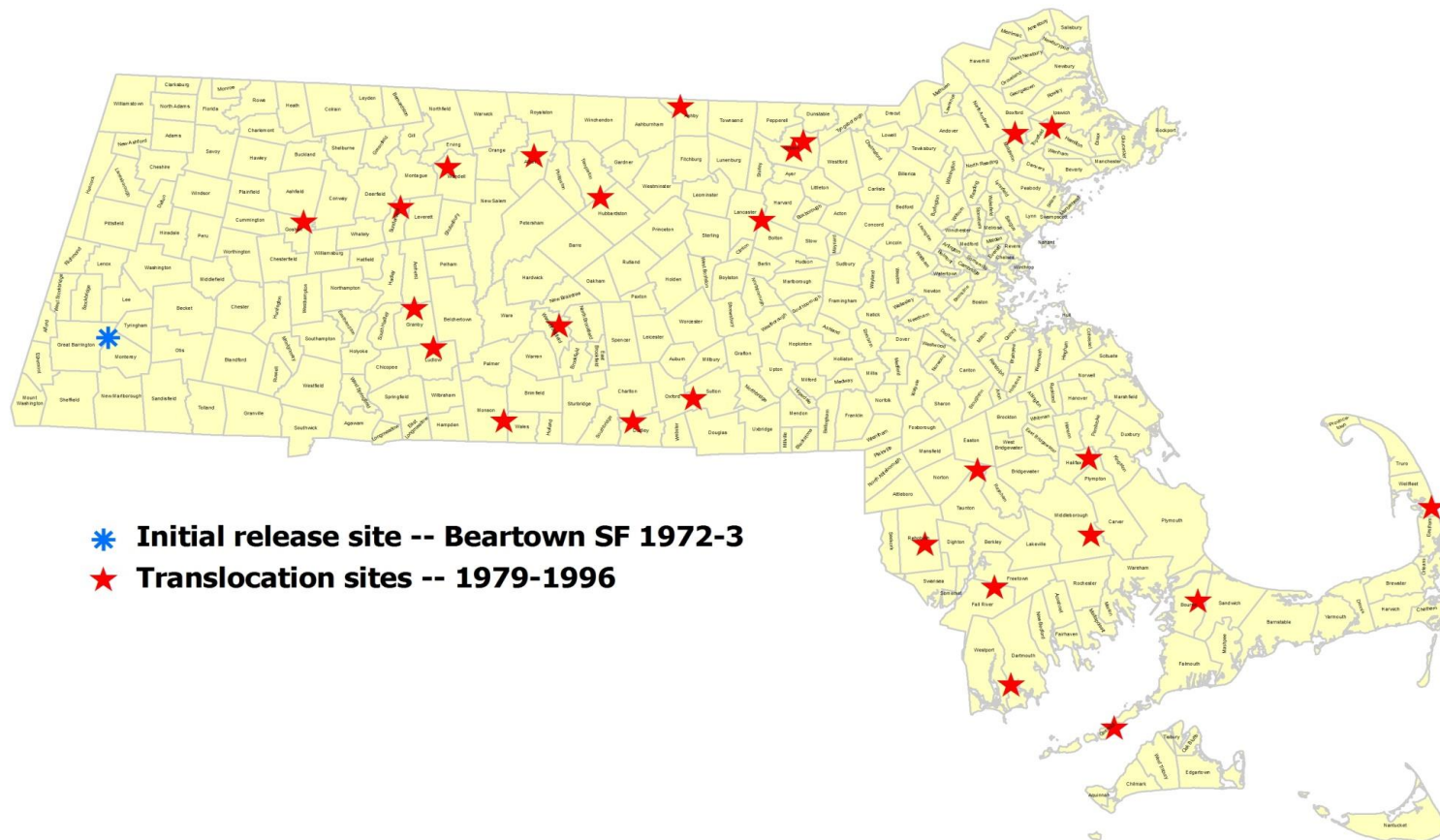
- **1972-73, 37 wild trapped turkeys were relocated from New York state**
- **Released in a section of Bear Town State Forest (Berkshire County)**



# Rapid Turkey Range Expansion



# Trap and Transplant







# Turkey Breeding Biology

- **Day length is primary stimulus**
- **Courtship begins in late February - March**
- **Peak gobbling activity is usually in mid-April**
- **Gobbling and breeding may continue well into late spring**



# Male Breeding Behavior

- Males are polygamous
- Exert dominance over juveniles, other adults
- Distinctive courtship displays - “strutting” - and coloration
- Distinct vocalizations



# Spring Turkey Season

- Timed to avoid peak of breeding activity in mid April
- Harvesting males during mid-April would result in suboptimal reproduction
- Ideally spring hunting occurs when hens are initiating **INCUBATION**



# Turkey Nesting

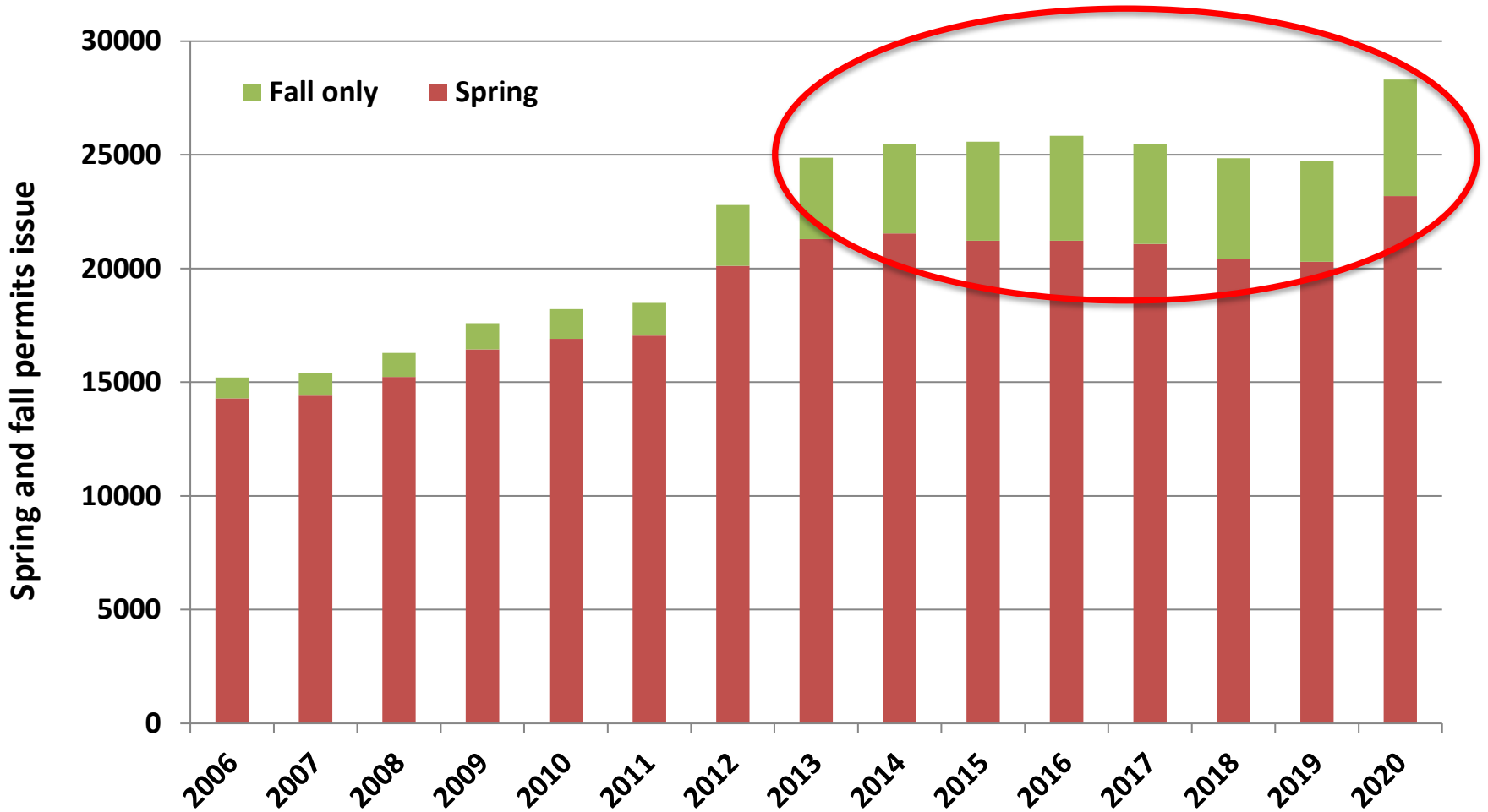
- **Ground nest in shall depression in litter**
- **8-15 eggs, usually 12 in MA**
- **Brushy habitat, highly variable**
- **Peak incubation usually begins around first week of May**



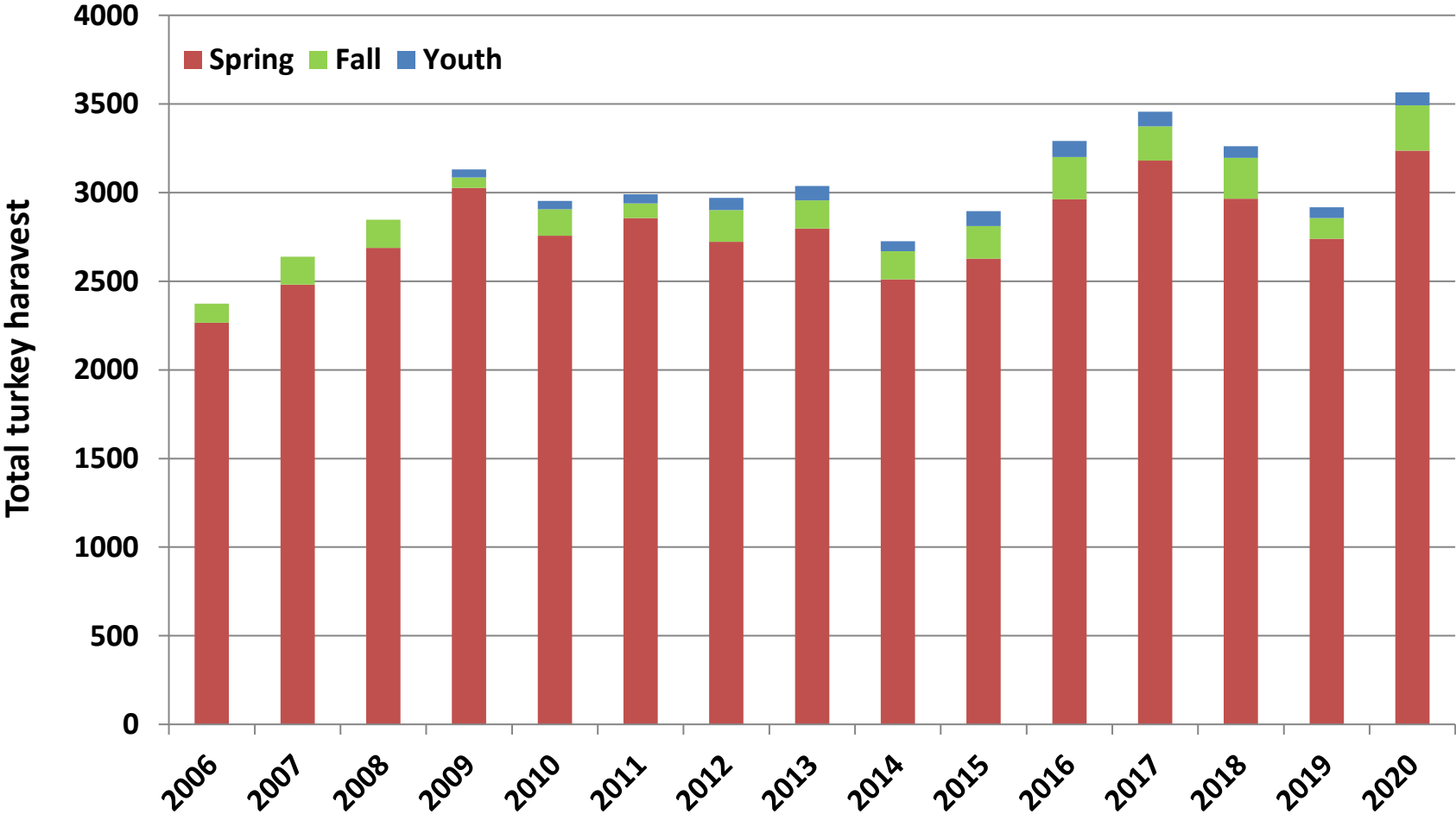
# Spring season breakdown

- **Fall hunting was more traditional**
- **Spring tom hunting gained much popularity by the 1950's**
- **Gobblers very responsive to calls = FUN!!!**
- **Season timed to avoid significant disturbance to breeding activity**
- **Subsequent male harvest has minimal impact on population**

# Turkey permits issued 2006-2020

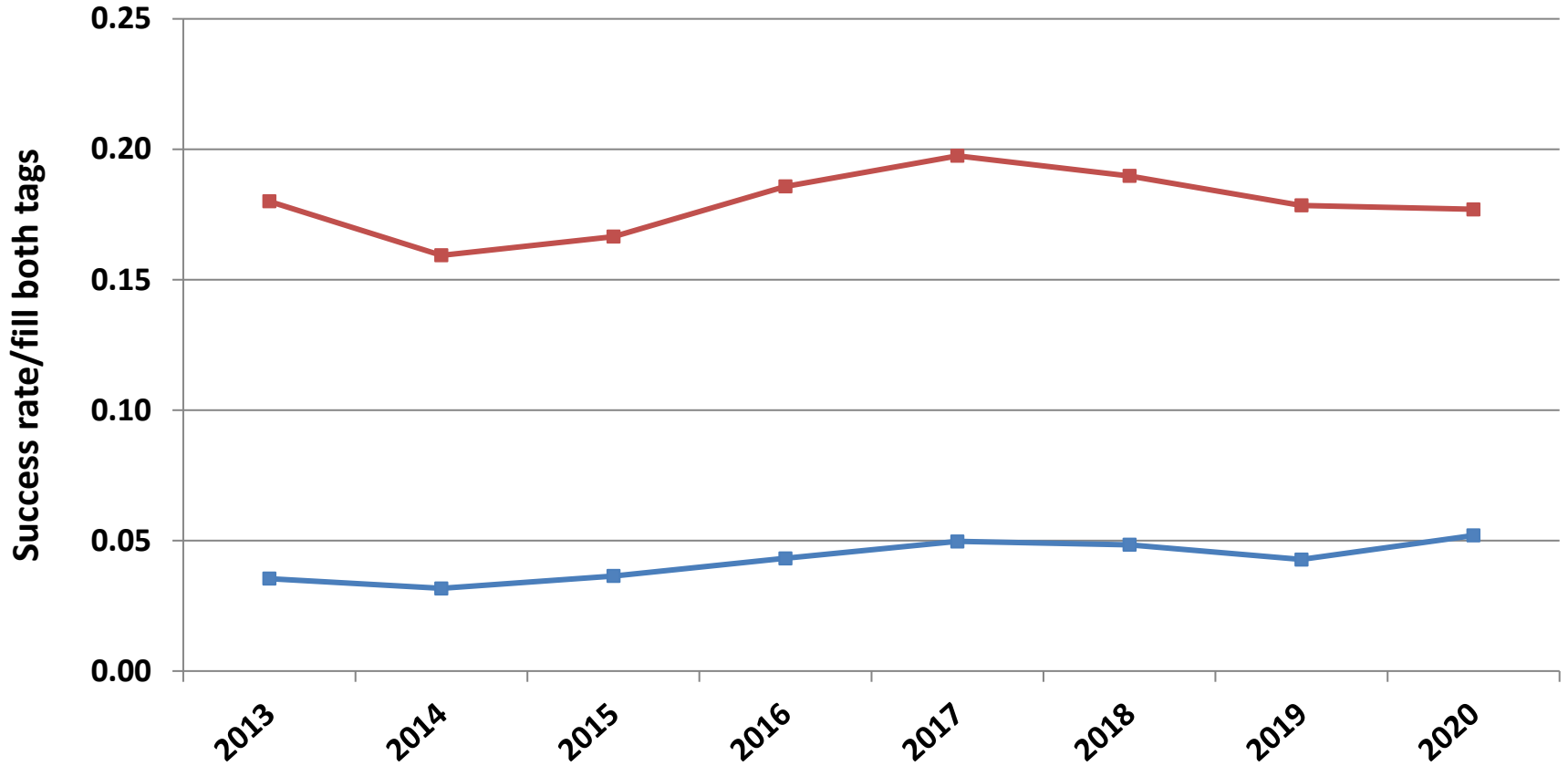


# Reported turkey harvest 2006-2020

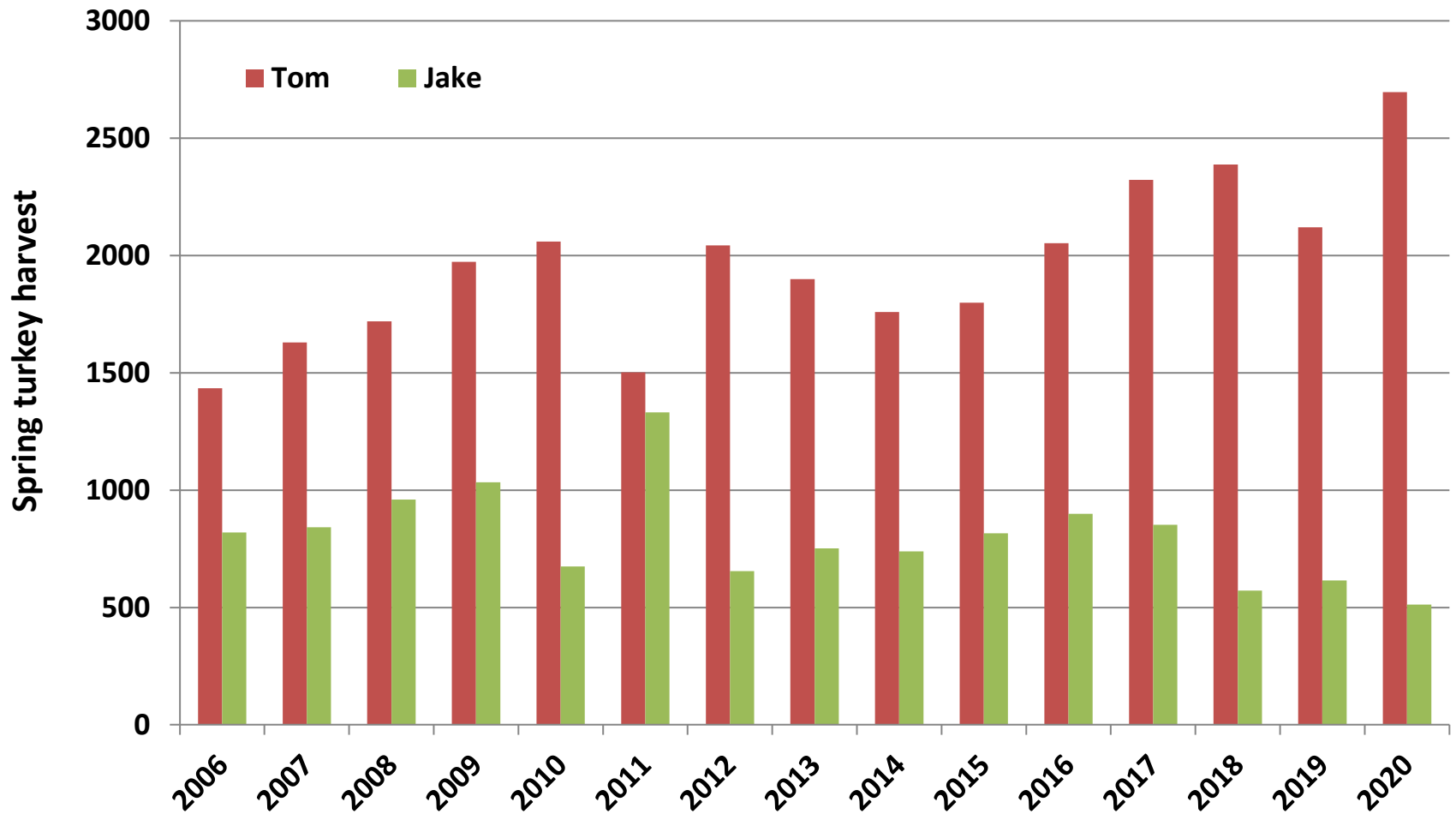




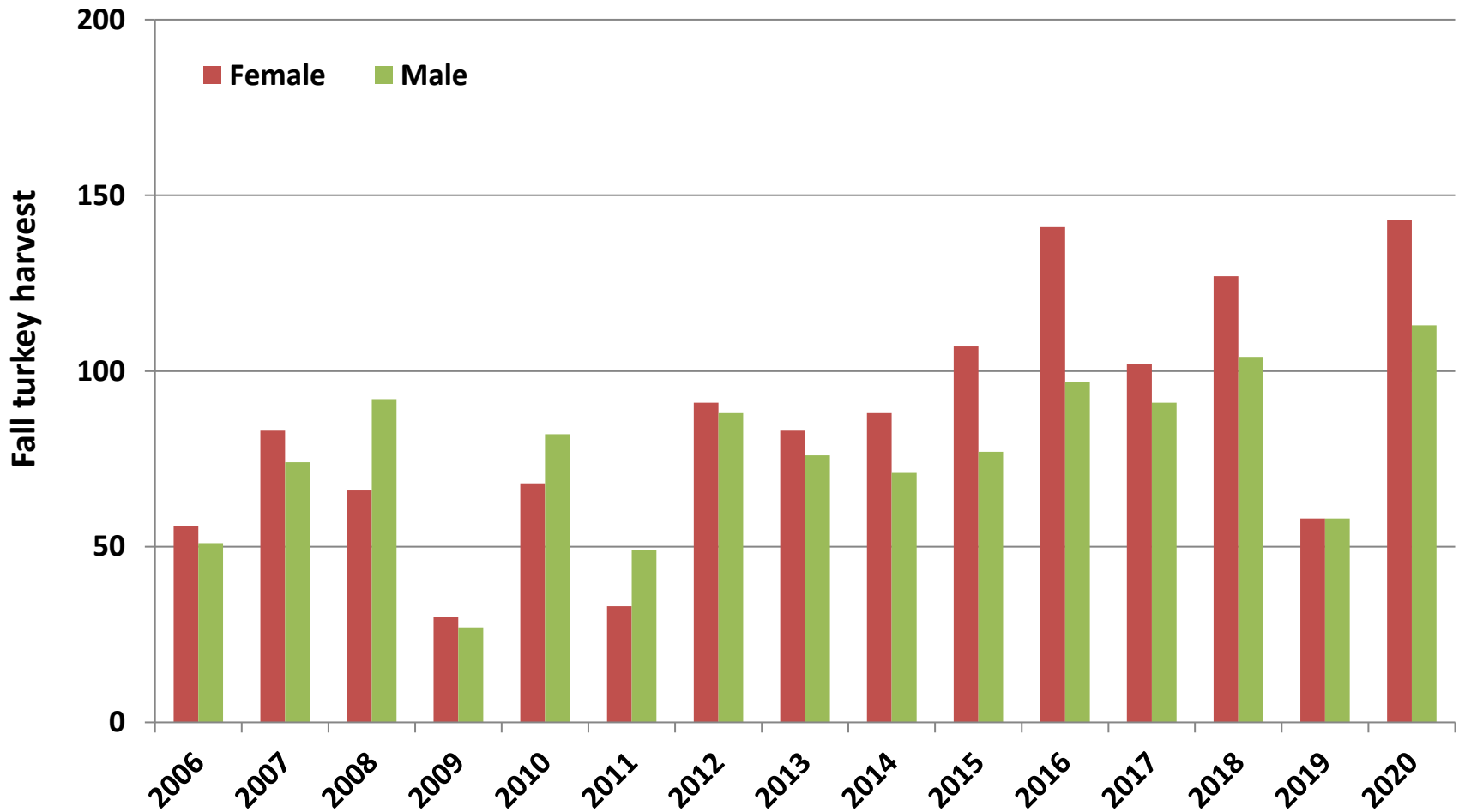
# Spring success rate/% fill both tags



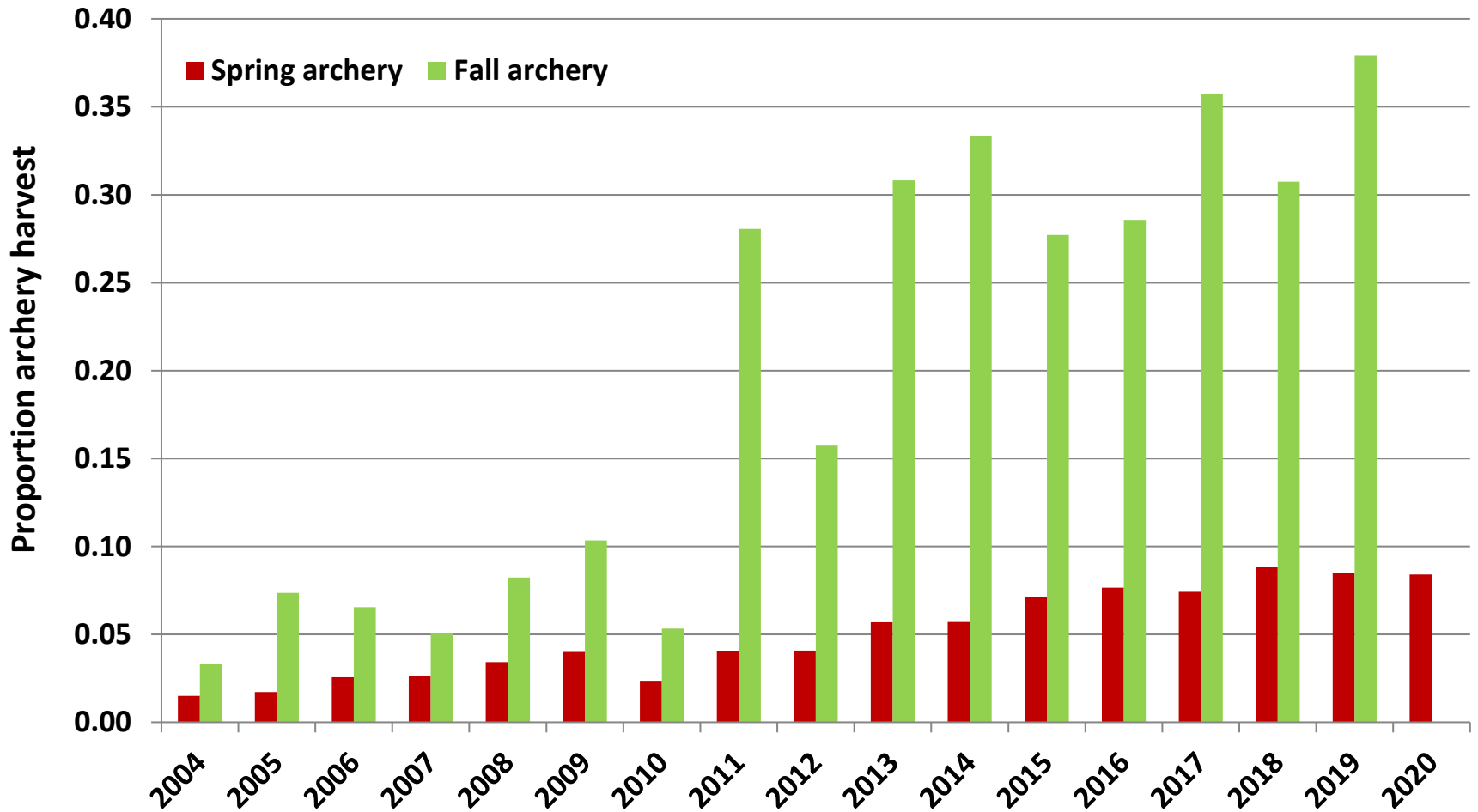
# Spring harvest by age 2006-2020



# Fall harvest 2006-2020



# Fall/Spring archery harvest



# Hunt safely!

- Hunt safely sticker affixed to shotgun while sighting down the bore
- Never stalk a turkey, **NEVER**
- Avoid wearing red, white, blue
- Be sure of your target and what's beyond
- Consider blaze when moving, be cautious with decoys and harvested birds too



# SUMMARY

- **Turkey restoration a huge conservation success story**
- **Turkeys now inhabit almost every town in MA (sorry Nantucket)**
- **Hunting seasons timed to minimize breeding disturbance, optimizes spring harvest**
- **Healthy populations exist statewide, turkeys becoming increasingly residential in the past decade**

# ***QUESTIONS?***





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