

Turkey's scientific name is *Meleagris gallopavo* (mel-e-AY-gris-low-PAY-voe) from Latin *gallus* (meaning cock) and *pavo* (meaning chickenlike). *Meleagris* is the Roman name for guineafowl - suggestive of the early confusion of the turkey with guineafowl. It is by no means clear how the turkey gained its name, one colourful theory claims a certain resemblance between the turkey stag's head and the helmet of a soldier of the Turkish Empire, another suggestion is from the wild turkey's call which sounds like *turk-turk-turk*. And yet another likely explanation is that in the 16th century, merchants trading along the seaboard of the Mediterranean were known as *Turkes* - they probably included the birds in their merchandise and they became known as turkey fowls.

One theory is that Columbus thought the new world was connected to India and that turkeys were really peacocks, so he named them "Tuka" which is peacock in the Tamil language of India, whilst in Spain, the turkey was often referred to as Indian fowl, an allusion which is repeated in the French 'dindon' formed with *d'Inde* which means 'from India'.

What we do know is that turkeys have been around for 10 million years - there are fossils to prove it. The American Indians hunted wild turkey for its sweet, juicy meat as early as 1000AD. Turkey feathers were used to stabilise arrows and adorn ceremonial dress, and the spurs on the legs of wild tom turkeys were used as projectiles on arrowheads.

Turkeys are believed to have first been brought to Britain in 1526 by a Yorkshireman called William Strickland - he acquired six birds from American Indian traders on his travels and sold them for tuppence each in Bristol. Henry VIII was the first English king to enjoy turkey, although Edward VII made eating turkey fashionable at Christmas.

So, just exactly who eats turkey? Well, 10 million units of turkey were sold last Christmas, and 2 out of every 3 whole birds sold last December were frozen. For 87% of people in the UK, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a traditional roast turkey!

Turkey Trivia!!

- \* Turkeys originated from Mexico not Turkey.
- \* The first meal eaten on the moon by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin was cold roast turkey.
- \* Turkey was a luxury right up until the 1950s, when refrigerators and freezers became more widely available
- \* The bronze coloured wild turkey must fly to survive and glide a mile without fluttering a wing.
- \* Female turkeys are called hens, male turkeys are toms and baby turkeys are called poults.

\* Most of the turkeys raised commercially are White Holland's which have all white plumage. The Bronze turkey was the chief turkey raised in Canada until mid '60s.

\* The Guinness Book of Records state's that the greatest dressed weight recorded for a turkey is 39.09kg (86lbs), at the last annual "heaviest turkey" competition held in London, on December 12, 1989.

\* The most common enquiries received by the British Turkey Information Service at Christmas are requests for thawing and roasting times.

\* The more bizarre enquiries usually come from confused callers wanting information about Istanbul, kebabs and carpets.