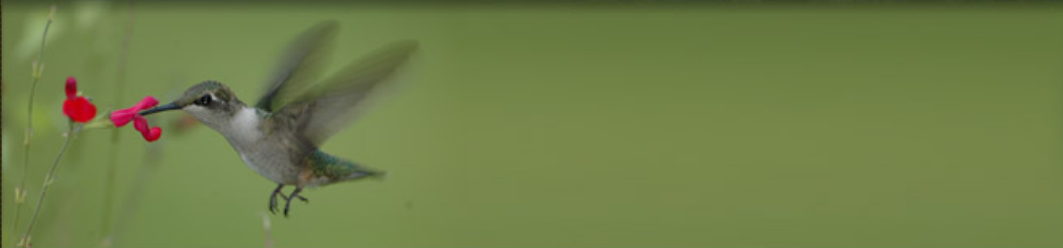




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## Turkey Production Survey

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### Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2002

The 2002 hunting season was the 24th year of our annual turkey population survey. The continuing cooperation of turkey hunters has made the survey possible. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. The information you provide is valuable in several ways.

### Turkey Production Index Survey

In 2002, 648 broods were seen, up 31.4% from 493 in 2001. However, brood totals can be misleading as a measure of production. The number of poults per observer is the best measure or index of relative reproduction success because it accounts for annual differences in number of observers and poults in broods. The average brood size of 6.01 poults seen in 2002 differed significantly from 6.96 the previous year. The statewide production index of poults per observer (24.10) was up slightly from last year's 21.34. The average number of poults per hen was 2.5 in 2002, which is an increase from 2.2 in 2001. An average of 3.0 or above is usually considered an indicator of good production. These data suggest that on a statewide basis turkey production is still somewhat depressed, and can be considered fair to good, especially when compared to the excellent reproduction in 1993-95. Cyclic, up-and-down trends are a natural aspect observed in wildlife populations, especially in turkeys as reproduction can be greatly affected by unpredictable, spring weather conditions. The recent drought in Georgia can also impact reproductive success because of decreased insect production and reduced habitat quality. Whether this drought will continue in 2003 remains to be seen. Managing for quality habitat should remain a priority to avoid additional limitations during seasons of low production and to take advantage of when upward trends in reproduction. Overall, Georgia's turkey population is still excellent and should remain so in the foreseeable future.

### Hunting Population Index Survey

This survey is conducted during the spring gobbler season with hunt data being supplied by hunter volunteers. Specific information requested about each hunting trip from our hunter cooperators is the date, hours hunted, county or region of the state hunted, the number of turkeys seen, the number of gobblers heard, and the number of gobblers killed.

The hours of hunting effort per turkey observed is used as an index of the hunting population. The correlation between this index and the production index is used in evaluating annual production and resulting hunting season populations.

Hunt information in usable form was supplied by 446 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2002. They reported making 3,906 trips totaling 12,989 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 8.5 trips totaling 36.4 hours. This is an increase of 4 hours from the 2001 season average effort.

A total of 9,212 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The statewide population index of 2.6 hunting hours per turkey seen was higher than in 2001, but still good, judging from the 24 years surveyed. The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Piedmont Plateau counties, and the greatest was in the Appalachian Highlands and Blue Ridge Mountain counties. This trend has remained fairly constant over the years.

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#### Navigate to Page:

- [Introduction](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2016](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2015](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2014](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2013](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2012](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2011](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2010](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2009](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2008](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2007](#)
- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2006](#)

Cooperators reported hearing 7,017 gobblers. The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 3.2 hours. Fair to good reproductive success in preceding years along with an abundance of adult gobblers once again were factors contributing to the continued low hunting effort per gobbling bird in 2002. Similar to previous seasons, the least amount of time hunting per gobbler heard, 1.6 hours, was in the Piedmont Plateau, and the greatest amount of time, 4.9 hours, was in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Statewide, peak gobbling activity, 2.5 gobblers per trip, occurred during the opening weekend, but peaked again at 2.4 in the third week of April.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2002 season accounted for 32.0% of the total season harvest. The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 34.2 hours, increased by 6.3 hours from 2001. Statewide hunter success rose significantly to 74.2% with 331 of the 446 cooperators taking at least one bird. Of these, 240 (72.5%) hunters took one bird, 52 (15.7%) took two birds, and 39 (11.8%) took three birds. Cooperators reported 37 gobblers killed by companions.

## 2003 Season Forecast

Georgia's estimated 42,181 turkey hunters had a good spring season in 2002, harvesting about 27,418 birds statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.65) was up slightly from 0.59 in 2001. Of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 79.6% rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while only 5.5% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2003 spring season in general should be good again depending upon the weather. Because reproduction has been on a slight upturn during the past two years there may be more jakes and two-year-old birds this season. Overall the state's turkey population is still strong. Hopefully, reproduction will continue this rebound and the future will remain bright for Georgia's number one game bird. Good luck and good hunting.

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