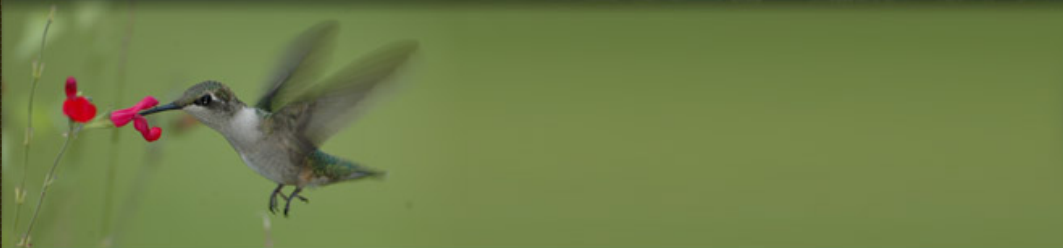




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Turkey Production Survey

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Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2005

The 2005 hunting season was the 27th 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

This survey was conducted from May through August from 1978 thru 1990. Beginning in 1991, the annual survey period was shortened to June through August. Field personnel of the Game Management, Law Enforcement, and Fisheries Management Sections of the Wildlife Resources Division are involved in data collection. All observations of turkey broods and hens, with and without poults, are reported.

In 2005, 248 broods were seen, down 30% from 354 in 2004. 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 9.96 poults seen in 2005 was 5.6% less than observed in 2004 (10.55). The statewide production index of poults per observer (12.89) was 29.4% less than last years 18.28. The average number of poults per hen was 1.5 in 2005 down 25% from 2.0 in 2004. An average of 3.0 or above is usually considered an indicator of good production in expanding turkey populations.

These data suggest that on a statewide basis turkey production was still depressed in 2005, and may be considered poor, 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 extremes in Georgia weather can also impact reproductive success because of variable insect production and habitat quality. Managing for quality habitat should remain a priority to avoid additional limitations during seasons of low production and to take advantage of upward trends in reproduction. Overall, Georgias turkey population is still very good.

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 335 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2005. They reported making 3,522 trips totaling 11,724 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 10.5 trips totaling 35 hours. This is a slight decrease from the 2004 season average effort.

A total of 7,023 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The 2005 statewide *population index* of 1.6 hunting hours per turkey seen was relatively the same as in 2003 and 2004, which is very good, judging from the 26 years surveyed. The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Ridge and Valley, Lower and Upper Coastal Plain counties.

Cooperators reported hearing 4,881 gobblers. The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 2.4 hours. Fair to good reproductive success in years past along with an abundance of adult gobblers once again were factors

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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](#)

contributing to the continued low hunting effort per gobbling bird in 2005. The effort per gobbler heard was least in Upper and Lower Coastal Plain and highest in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Peak gobbling activity, 2.0 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the first weekend (March 26-27) of the season.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2005 season accounted for 29% of the total season harvest. The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 24.4 hours (Table 4), increased by 1 hour from 2004. Statewide hunter success declined slightly to 65.4% with 219 of the 335 cooperators taking at least one bird. Of these, 90 (26.9%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 58 (17.3%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 71 (21.2%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 74 gobblers killed by companions.

2006 Season Forecast

According to a post-season survey, Georgias estimated 76,000 turkey hunters had a good spring season in 2005, harvesting about 42,000 birds statewide. (These higher estimates are likely the result of changing the state licensing system and survey techniques and do not represent as significant a change in turkey hunter numbers or turkey harvest as it would seem from previous years estimates. We are working to verify techniques used to conduct the survey are truly representative of what is occurring in our state). The average harvest per hunter (0.56 turkeys) was around 14% lower than the previous two seasons (2003 and 2004), which could have been attributed to many weekends of inclement weather making hunting more difficult. Of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 70% rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while 10% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2006 spring season in general should be good again depending upon the weather and the number of residual adult birds.

Overall the states turkey population is still strong, but in need of a few years of better reproduction. Hopefully, reproduction will rebound and the future will remain bright for Georgias number one game bird. Good luck and good hunting.

- [Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2005](#)
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