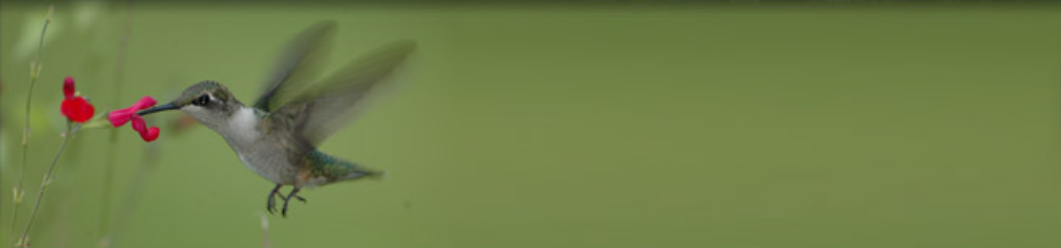




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Turkey Production Survey

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Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2007

The 2007 hunting season was the 29th year of our annual turkey population survey. The continuing cooperation of turkey hunters has made the survey possible. Your assistance is greatly appreciated and the information you provide is valuable in tracking our turkey population.

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.

During the summer of 2007, 336 broods were seen, which was down 21% from 426 in 2006. However, brood totals alone can be misleading as a measure of production. In past years the number of poults per observer was the best measure or index of relative reproduction success (and ultimately population levels) because it accounted for annual differences in number of observers and poults in broods. In recent years DNR biologists have had a chance to further analyze this long-term set of production data and have determined that the count of Poults + Hens may actually be the better predictor for the following seasons hunting population rather than Poults per Observer. For the next several years we will be using both measures to determine which index is the better predictor. The average brood size of 6.3 poults seen in 2007 was 25% less than observed in 2006 (8.4) and 23% less than the previous 5-years average (8.2). The statewide production index of poults per observer (10.00) was 37% less than last years 15.88 and 41% below the 5-year average (16.9). The production index poults + hens was 4,005 in 2007, which was 31% less than the 2006 index of 5,787 and 22% below the 5-year average of 5,154. The average number of poults per hen was 1.1 in 2007 down 31% from 1.6 in 2006 and down 41% from the previous 5-years average (1.9). An average of 3.0 or above is usually considered an indicator of good production in expanding turkey populations. The past several years of production data and harvest data indicate that the turkey population in Georgia is stabilized and no longer expanding, therefore reproductive levels do not have to be as high to sustain current population levels. It appears that reproductive levels around 2 poults per hen or slightly less have been able to maintain our current population level for the past 10 years.

Reproduction data suggest that on a statewide basis turkey production was once again depressed in 2007, and may be considered poor, especially when compared to the excellent reproduction in the previous decade. With the past 3 years of reproduction being so low, Georgia will likely see a decline in turkey population, but this can quickly change with just one good reproduction year! 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/summer weather conditions (such as this years drought in much of the state). Managing for quality habitat should remain a priority to avoid additional limitations during seasons of low production. Overall, Georgias turkey population is still good.

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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 467 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2007. They reported making 4,904 trips totaling 16,946 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 10.5 trips totaling 36.3 hours. This is a slight increase from the 2006 season average effort and the 5-year average (10.2 trips and 36.1 hours).

A total of 10,511 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The 2007 statewide *population index* of 1.6 hunting hours per turkey seen was 11% greater than in both 2006 and for the last 5 years average (1.8), which is very good, judging from the 29 years surveyed. The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Ridge and Valley, Lower and Upper Coastal Plain counties.

Cooperators reported hearing 8,083 gobblers. The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 2.1 hours. The effort per gobbler heard was least in Lower and Upper Coastal Plains and highest in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Peak gobbling activity, 3.0 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the first weekend (March 24-25) of the season.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2007 season accounted for 36% of the total season harvest. The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 23.1 hours, decreased by 2 hours from 2006 (26) and 3.5 hours from the 5-year average (26.6). Statewide hunter success declined slightly to 67.9% with 317 of the 467 cooperators taking at least one bird and was down slightly from the 5-year average (69.2%). Of these, 115 (24.6%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 87 (17.3%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 115 (24.6%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 194 gobblers killed by companions.

2008 Season Forecast

According to a post-season telephone survey, Georgia's estimated 48,459 resident turkey hunters had another good spring season in 2007, harvesting about 23,655 gobblers statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.49 turkeys) was around 22% lower than in 2006 and 17% lower than the previous 5 years averaged. However, of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 69% still rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while only 11% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2008 spring season should be respectable, but likely down from past years harvests levels, as consistently low reproduction (record low in Summer 2007) for the past few years, extreme statewide drought, the late freeze in north Georgia, wildfires in south Georgia, and additional habitat losses may add up to fewer gobblers available for hunters.

Overall the states turkey population is still good, but in need of a few years of better reproduction and more of an emphasis on good brooding and nesting habitat across the landscape. Hopefully, the extreme drought will break soon, reproduction will rebound and the future will remain bright for Georgias number one game bird. Good luck and good hunting!

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