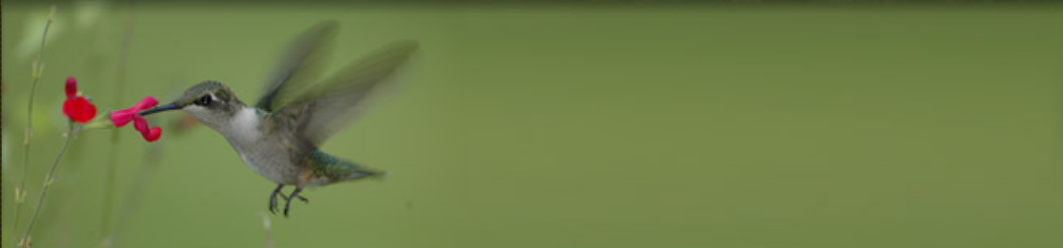




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## Turkey Production Survey

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### Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2011

The 2011 hunting season was the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of our annual turkey population survey. The continuing cooperation of turkey hunters has made the survey possible. Your assistance is vital to managing wild turkeys in Georgia. We greatly appreciate this partnership.

#### Turkey Production Index Survey

Historically, 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 2011, 415 broods were seen, which was up 16.6% from 356 in 2010. The average brood size of 6.9 poults observed in 2011 was 23% less than 2010 (8.9) and 15.8% less than the previous 5-years average (8.1). The statewide production index of poults per observer (16.4) was the same as last year (16.4) and 21.5% greater than the 5-year average (13.5). The production index 'poults + hens' was 4,428 in 2011, which was 7.8% lower than the 2010 index of 4,800 and 6% lower than the 5-year average of 4,708. The average number of poults per hen was 1.79 in 2011 down 7.3% from 1.93 in 2010. This was still 12% greater than the previous 5-years average (1.6). An average of 3.0 poults/hen 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 reproductive levels around 2 poults per hen or slightly less have been able to maintain our current population level for the past 10 years. A production index of 1.79 poults/hen, while lower than last year, is still pretty good. Most of the state performed much better, but the drought in the coastal plain affected production and lowered the statewide average. Hopefully the excellent reproduction in the coastal plain in 2010 will make up for some of the losses.

Reproduction data suggests that turkey production was good in many parts of Georgia in 2011. The Blue Ridge area of the state experienced significant increases. The poults/hen index was 2.12 which is a 27.5% increase from 2010. Poults/observer was up 42% with an average of 29.3 poults observed/observer. The Piedmont region also did well. The poult/hen index was 2.25, up 10.4% from 2010. The index of total poults + total hens (1659) also increased by 27.4% and poults/observer (22.8) was up 37% from 2010. The Ridge and Valley region was relatively stable. In 2011, the Ridge and Valley region experienced a slight decrease in the poult/hen index (7.5%), but was still good with 2.05 poults/hen. In contrast, the Ridge and Valley had an 80% increase in the poults/observer index

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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](#)

(42.29) and a 25.5% increase in the total poult + total hens index (585). Due to the drought, South Georgia did not produce as well. The Upper Coastal Plain region experience a 21% decrease in the poult/hen index (1.4), a 20% decrease in the poults/observer index (9.91), and a 21% decrease in the total poults +total hens index (912). Reproduction really suffered in the Lower Coastal Plain. This region experienced a 43% decrease in poults/hen index (1.14), a 58% decrease in poults/observer index (7.9), and a 53% decrease in the total poults + total hens index (649). Without adequate spring rainfall, the Coastal Plain was not able to product suitable brood rearing and nesting habitat lowering turkey recruitment. The statewide picture is better with much of the state performing well above the 5 year averages for the respective regions.

### 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.

Usable hunt data was supplied by 457 cooperators. Of these, 430 came from the permanent cooperator list and 27 from the NWTF list which resulted in a reporting rate (after deleting wrong addresses, deceased, quit hunting, incorrect data collection, etc.) of 37.2% and 3.5% from the permanent and NWTF list cooperators, respectively. These cooperators reported spending a total of 16,327.5 hours hunting. The average season hunter effort was 10.2 trips totaling 35.7 hours. They reported observing 9,579 turkeys and hearing 7,517 gobblers. The statewide population index of 1.7 was the same as last year. The effort per gobbler heard of 2.2 was 18% lower than 2010 (1.8) and slightly less than the 5-year average (2.1). Hunters spent an average of 24.3 hours/turkey harvested, which is a 13% decrease from 2010. The least hunting effort per turkey seen occurred in the Ridge and Valley, Upper and Lower Coastal Plain. The effort per gobbler heard was least in Upper and Lower Coastal Plain and greatest in the Blue Ridge Region.

Statewide peak gobbling activity, 2.5 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the first (March 26-7) weekend. The next highest period recorded 2.1 gobblers heard per trip was the second weekend (April 2-3). This season there were 2 periods with greater than or equal to 2.0 gobblers heard per trip, whereas last year there was six. For most of the state, the greatest amount of gobbling activity was the first 7 days (Mar 26 – April 1) and the 7-day period of April 12- 18. Peaks of gobbling by region occurred during the first and sixth weekends (March 26-27, April 30-May 1, respectively) for the Ridge and Valley, the third week (April 9-10) for the Blue Ridge Mountains, the first weekend (March 26-27) for the Piedmont, Upper Coastal Plain, and the Lower Coastal Plain.

The statewide gobbler harvest during the first seven days of the season amounted to 30% of the total season harvest, which was similar to the 5 year average of 32%. Peak harvest was generally seen within the first seven days of the season in all parts of the state.

The greatest number of trips was made during the first seven days of the season; this was similar to past seasons. Only minor variations in hunting effort have occurred over the years.

Hunter success was stable (67.3% in 2010 and 67.4 % in 2011) with 308 of 457 hunters reported taking or assisting in taking at least one gobbler. Of the successful hunters, 123 (26.9%) took or assisted in taking one bird, 80 (7.5%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 105 (23.0%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 183 gobblers killed by companions.

### 2011-12 Season Forecast

According to a post-season telephone survey, Georgia's estimated 44,013 resident turkey hunters had another good spring season in 2011, harvesting about 26,516 gobblers statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.60 turkeys decreased 16.6% from 2010, but were still 7.14% better than the previous 5 years averaged (.56). Not surprising, 71.3% of turkey hunters surveyed rated Georgia turkey hunting good or excellent. The turkey population in Georgia has declined since 2003, primarily due to poor reproduction and loss of quality habitat. I think we will continue to experience the ups and downs of normal population cycles typical of a stable population at or near capacity. We recently estimated the population at about 335,000 turkeys and harvest rates remain good. In the

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coastal plain we had a good hatch in 2010 and this region should have an abundant supply of vocal 2- year- old gobblers. Temper that with very poor reproduction in the Coastal Plain in 2009 and 2011, the supply of older gobblers and jakes may be limited. The other regions of the state (Piedmont, Ridge and Valley, and Blue Ridge) have had 3 years of fair to great reproduction from 2009-11. This should set the stage for what I feel could be an outstanding spring season. My only concern is the weather. The early spring green up we are experiencing in February 2012 can make hunting harder. A late spring freeze, coinciding with the opening weeks of the turkey season, can also slow hunter success. The silver lining is that generally an early spring green up and early breeding activity can be good for wild turkey recruitment.