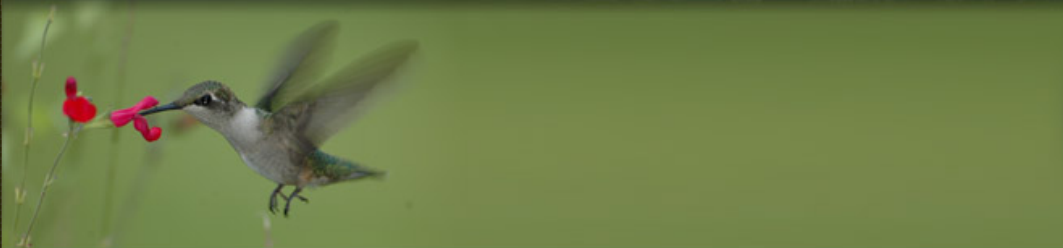




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## Turkey Production Survey

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### Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2004

The 2004 hunting season was the 26th 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 2004, 354 broods were seen, down 21.0% from 448 in 2003. 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 (see Table 1). The average brood size of 10.55 poults seen in 2004 was 80.4% greater than observed in 2003 (5.85). The statewide production index of poults per observer (18.28) was 39.4% greater than last years 13.11. The average number of poults per hen was 2.0 in 2004 up 68.6% from 1.2 in 2003, which was the lowest in 25 years of the study. 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 was still depressed in 2004, and can 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 440 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2004. They reported making 4796 trips totaling 16,151 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 10.9 trips totaling 36.7 hours. This is a slight increase from the 2003 season average effort.

A total of 11,287 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The statewide population index of 1.4 hunting hours per turkey seen was relatively the same as in 2003, which is very good, judging from the 25 years surveyed

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(see Table 2). The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Ridge and Valley, Lower and Upper Coastal Plain counties.

Cooperators reported hearing 7,938 gobblers (see Table 3). The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 2.0 hours. Fair to good reproductive success in years past along with an abundance of adult gobblers once again were factors contributing to the continued low hunting effort per gobbling bird in 2004. The effort per gobbler heard was least in Upper and Lower Coastal Plain and highest in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Peak gobbling activity, 2.2 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the second weekend (March 27-28) of the season.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2004 season accounted for 33.0% of the total season harvest (see Table 6). The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 23.4 hours (Table 4), decreased by 2.3 hours from 2003. Statewide hunter success rose slightly to 69.3% with 305 of the 440 cooperators taking at least one bird. Of these, 113 (25.7%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 83 (18.9%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 109 (24.8%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 110 gobblers killed by companions.

#### 2005 Season Forecast

According to a post-season survey, Georgias estimated 36,000 turkey hunters had a good spring season in 2004, harvesting about 24,000 birds statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.65) was the same as in 2002 and 2003. Of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 76% rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while less than 7% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2005 spring season in general should be good again depending upon the weather and the number of residual adult birds.

Because reproduction has been on a slight upturn up until the past spring, there may be more adult birds than juveniles this season. 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.

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