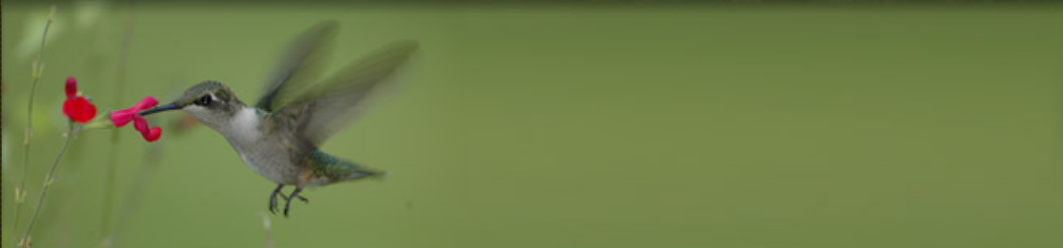




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Turkey Production Survey

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Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2008

The 2008 hunting season was the 30th 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 2008, 333 broods were seen, which was down 0.9% from 336 in 2007. 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. As we have for the past several years, we will be using both measures to determine which index is the better predictor. The average brood size of 10.9 poults seen in 2008 was 73.3% greater than observed in 2007 (6.3) and 33% greater than the previous 5-years average (8.2). The statewide production index of poults per observer (16.04) was 60.4% greater than last years 10.00 and 14.3% higher than the 5-year average (14.03). The production index poults + hens was 5239 in 2008, which was 30.8% greater than the 2007 index of 4005 and 7.7% higher than the 5-year average of 4864. The average number of poults per hen was 2.3 in 2008 up 102% from 1.1 in 2007 and was 58.6% greater than the previous 5-years average (1.45). 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 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 2.3 poults/hen should produce noticeable increases in some turkey populations around the state.

Reproduction data suggest that on a statewide basis turkey production was good in many parts of Georgia in 2008. We have not had a hatch that good since 2002. With that said, we have had poor reproduction 4 out of the last 5 years. The overall turkey population has declined and may take some time to rebound. Increased reproduction in 2008 is a positive reminder that when habitat conditions are right and weather is favorable, turkey population can respond quickly. 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. Lets hope this is the start of an upward trend.

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,

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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 434 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2008. They reported making 4,511 trips totaling 15,026 hours. The season hunting effort per cooperators was 10.4 trips totaling 34.6 hours. This is a slight decrease from the 2007 season average effort and the 5-year average (10.6 trips and 36.1 hours). The decreased effort was likely due to higher fuel costs.

A total of 7873 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The 2008 statewide population index of 1.9 hunting hours per turkey seen was 16% greater than in 2007. The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Ridge and Valley and Lower Coastal Plain counties.

Cooperators reported hearing 7609 gobblers. The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 2.0 hours. The effort per gobbler heard was least in Lower and Upper Coastal Plains and highest in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Peak gobbling activity, 2.6 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the first weekend (March 22-23) of the season.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2008 season accounted for 35% of the total season harvest. The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 22.4 hours, decreased by 0.7 hours from 2007 (23.1) and 1.9 hours from the 5-year average (24.3). Statewide hunter success declined slightly to 66.8% with 290 of the 434 cooperators taking at least one bird and was down slightly from the 5-year average (67.8%). Of these, 113 (26.0%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 74 (17.1%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 103 (23.7%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 186 gobblers killed by companions.

2009 Season Forecast

According to a post-season telephone survey, Georgias estimated 49,327 resident turkey hunters had another good spring season in 2008, harvesting about 24,297 gobblers statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.49 turkeys) was the same as in 2007 and 15.5% 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 10% rated it as poor. Poults production was high in many parts of the state during the 2008 spring. The 2009 harvest should increase slightly, with a lot of jakes being available for harvest. The 2010 spring should be outstanding when these young males become vocal 2-year-olds.

Overall the states turkey population is doing well, but could use several years of above average reproduction similar to 2008. Hopefully, the recent pattern of weather extremes will break in favor of more normal temperatures and rainfall amounts. This return to normalcy could set the stage for turkey populations to rebound in many areas of the state. Good luck and good hunting!

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