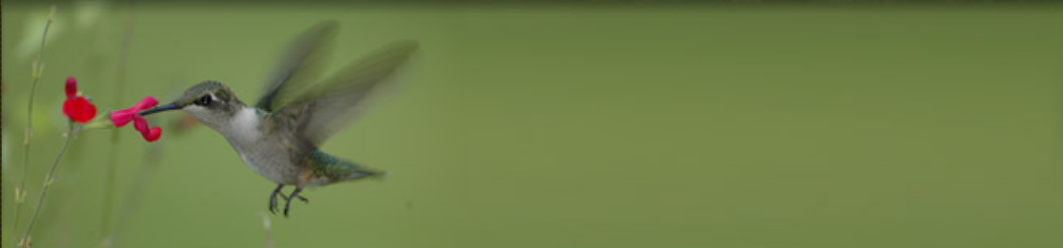




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Turkey Production Survey

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Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2006

The 2006 hunting season was the 28th 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 gobblers, turkey broods and hens, with and without poults, are reported.

In 2006, 426 broods were seen, an increase of 71.8% from 248 in 2005. However, brood totals 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 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 8.4 poults seen in 2006 was 15.6% less than observed in 2005 (9.96). The statewide production index of poults per observer (15.88) was 23.2% greater than last years value of 12.89. The production index poults + hens was 5,787 in 2006, which was 40.8% greater than the 2005 index of 4,109. The average number of poults per hen was 1.6 in 2006 up 7% from 1.5 in 2005. 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.

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. Extremes in weather (too wet or too dry) can 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 404 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2006. They reported making 4,548 trips totaling 15,297.8 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 11.3 trips

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Select a quick link

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](#)

totaling 37.9 hours, which is a slight increase from the 2005 season average effort.

A total of 8,708 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The 2006 statewide *population index* of 1.8 hunting hours per turkey seen was 11% longer than last season (1.6 hrs per turkey seen), but is still good, judging from the 27 years surveyed. The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Lower and Upper Coastal Plain counties and highest in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Cooperators reported hearing 6,775 gobblers. The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 2.3 hours, which was 4% less than 2005. 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 2006. 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 first weekend (March 25-26) of the season.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2006 season accounted for 37% of the total season harvest. Peak harvest was generally seen within the first seven days of the season in all parts of the state, except for in the Blue Ridge Mountains when it occurred during the third week of the season (April 10-14).

The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 24.4 hours, increased by 1 hour from 2004. Statewide hunter success increased to 69.1% with 279 of the 404 cooperators taking at least one bird. Of these, 114 (28.2%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 77 (19.1%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 88 (21.8%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 108 gobblers killed by companions.

2007 Season Forecast

According to a post-season phone survey, Georgias estimated 56,939 turkey hunters had a good spring season in 2006, harvesting an estimated 35,879 birds statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.63) was 12.5% greater than last season and 5% above the 5-yr average. Of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 70% rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while 11.5% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2007 spring season in general should have harvest rates similar to 2006, depending upon the weather and the number of residual adult birds.

Overall the states turkey population is still strong, but would likely benefit from a few years of better reproduction and improved habitat management. Hopefully, reproduction will remain adequate 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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