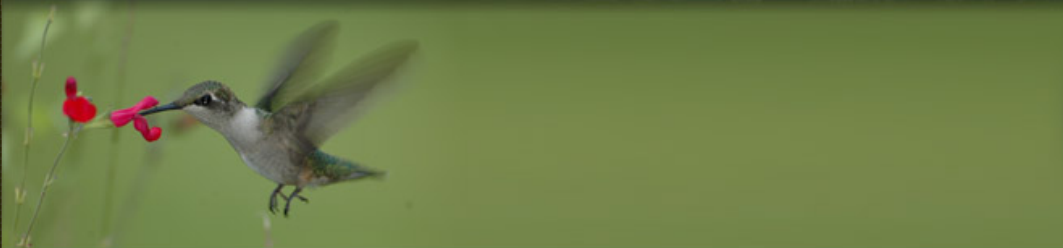




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## Turkey Production Survey

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### Wild Turkey Production and Population Survey Results for 2003

The 2003 hunting season was the 25th 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

In 2003, 448 broods were seen, down 30.9% from 648 in 2002. 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 5.85 poults seen in 2003 did not differ significantly from 6.01 the previous year. The statewide production index of poults per observer (13.11) was barely half of last year's 24.10. The average number of poults per hen was 1.2 in 2003, which is down 52.5% from 2.5 in 2002, and is the lowest recorded in the 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 significantly depressed in 2003, 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 drought in Georgia can also impact reproductive success because of decreased insect production and reduced habitat quality. This was followed in 2003 by an extremely wet spring. 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, Georgia's 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 435 of the 2,000 hunters contacted in 2002. They reported making 4,353 trips totaling 14,959 hunting hours. The season hunting effort per cooperator was 10.0 trips totaling 34.4 hours. This is a slight decrease from the 2002 season average effort.

A total of 9,818 turkeys (hens and gobblers) were seen. The statewide population index of 1.5 hunting hours per turkey seen was lower than in 2002 by about an hour, which is very good, judging from the 25 years surveyed (see Table 2). The lowest effort per bird seen was in the Upper Coastal Plain counties, and the greatest was in the Blue Ridge Mountain counties. This trend has remained fairly constant over the years.

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Cooperators reported hearing 7,858 gobblers (see Table 3). The hours of hunting per gobbler heard averaged 1.9 hours. Fair to good reproductive success in preceding years along with an abundance of adult gobblers once again were factors contributing to the continued low hunting effort per gobbling bird in 2003. Similar to previous seasons, the least amount of time hunting per gobbler heard, 1.8 hours, was in the Piedmont Plateau (also in the Lower Coastal Plain), and the greatest amount of time, 2.1 hours, was in the Upper Coastal Plain. Statewide, peak gobbling activity, 2.7 gobblers heard per trip, occurred during the fourth week of the season, but also showed a slightly lower peak during the opening weekend at 2.5 gobblers heard per trip.

The statewide harvest during the first seven days of the 2003 season accounted for 35.0% of the total season harvest (see Table 6). The average amount of hunting effort to kill a gobbler, 25.7 hours (Table 4), decreased by 8.5 hours from 2002. Statewide hunter success fell slightly to 68.0% with 296 of the 435 cooperators taking at least one bird. Of these, 288 (66.2%) hunters took or assisted in taking one bird, 71 (16.3%) took or assisted in taking two birds, and 50 (11.4%) took or assisted in taking three birds. Cooperators reported 53 gobblers killed by companions.

## 2004 Season Forecast

According to a post-season survey, Georgia's estimated 42,359 turkey hunters had a good spring season in 2003, harvesting about 27,533 birds statewide. The average harvest per hunter (0.65) was the same as in 2002. Of the turkey hunters surveyed after the season, 80% rated the turkey hunting good or excellent, while less than 6% rated it as poor. Across the state the 2004 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 state's 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 Georgia's number one game bird. Good luck and good hunting.

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