

NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF

Board of Directors Meeting, June 2, 2013

**Submitted by: Mary Jo Casalena, Wildlife Biologist II, and Ian Gregg, Gamebird Section
Supervisor, Bureau of Wildlife Management, PA Game Commission**

Final 2013-2014 Wild Turkey Seasons

PGC Board of Commissioners approved proposed changes to the fall wild turkey seasons to accommodate the cross-over design of the hen wild turkey fall harvest rate study to determine effect of 1-week season length changes on harvest rates: WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B & 4D – increase fall season from 2 weeks to 3 weeks; WMUs 2F, 2G & 2H – decrease fall season from 3 weeks to 2 weeks. Maintain changes for the remaining 2 years of the hen study. The Board also approved shortening the fall season in WMU 1B from two weeks to one week as recommended to help reverse the declining population trend. All other fall season lengths remain the same, including the 3-day Thanksgiving holiday season where currently open.

Spring 2014 season was approved as proposed, May 3 - 31. Although it opens later than the previous 2 years, the season maintains the closing date of May 31 as approved in 2011, and follows the Wild Turkey Management Plan guidelines for a 4-week season with 5 Saturdays, beginning the Saturday closest to May 1.

Harvest Management

Final fall 2012 harvest results will be available upon completion of the annual Game-Take Survey, in July. The preliminary harvest was re-adjusted to approximately 14,000 turkeys, which is 40% lower than the previous 10-year average and 35% lower than the previous 3-year average. The reporting period for the spring wild turkey season remains open until June 14. As of May 23, we received 14% more harvest reports than by the same time last season. Last year's final harvest of approximately 35,400 turkeys was 7% lower than the previous 3-year average of approximately 37,800 but 11% below the previous 10-year average of 39,900.

Special turkey licenses sold for the 2013 spring season by the end of March was 10,202, similar to the same time period in 2012 (10,103). The computerized point-of-sale (POS) licensing system allows special turkey license sales from July 1 until the spring season opens. Prior to POS, license sales were limited to January 1 – April 1.

Wild Turkey Hen Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

A turkey hunter survey was mailed to 10,000 general license holders after the fall 2012 season to determine hunter attitudes, satisfaction and daily participation. Results are being summarized.

The turkey biologist worked with the PGC Regions and PCFWRU at Penn State regarding data management and locating transmitters from mortalities. As expected, once hens dispersed from winter flocks, predation of transmittered hens increased due to flock dispersal and nest incubation. Of the 60 hens with satellite transmitters since last winter 43 were alive as of May 23 (23 in Study Area 1 and 20 in Study Area 2). Study Area 1 is comprised of WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B and 4D; Study Area 2 is comprised of WMUs 2F, 2G, and 2H.

Preliminary data from satellite locations indicate that at least 23 of the current 43 hens with transmitters (53%) had nested or had begun incubating by May 24, similar to the percent incubating at the beginning of May (11 in Study Area 1 and 12 in Study Area 2). As expected, since the beginning of incubation in mid-April (first detected incubation 4/11), a larger percentage of adult versus juvenile hens have incubated nests (67% versus 33%). Also since the beginning of incubation, most predated hens appeared to be incubating nests the day they were killed. Our telemetry data is not sensitive

enough to show whether the hens were actually killed on their nests, but we have found a few next to nests or what appeared to be a nest.

As of May 23 we have received 31 reports of harvested leg-banded gobblers, which were either incidental captures during the current hen study or part of the previous gobbler harvest rate study. Additionally, we received a report of a banded bearded hen (legally harvested) with eggs in her reproductive tract at varying stages of development, which the hunter provided to the Game Commission for educational purposes. Also, the oldest leg banded gobbler in recent history (at least 8 years old) was harvested during the youth season on State Game Lands in Lancaster County less than 2 miles from its initial capture location, on the same State Game Lands. Similarly, an 8+ year old gobbler was reported harvested in Ohio during their regular turkey season. These turkeys were leg banded as adults as part of the gobbler study during the winter of 2007; therefore they hatched in 2005 or earlier. Of the leg band gobbler reports, 17% were jakes (compared to 11% in 2012), 57% were at least two-year olds (compared to 53% last year) and 20% were at least three years old (16% last year). Our gobbler study showed gobbler life expectancy typically is 3 years or less. Only 2, 6%, were older (21% last year). Of the nine leg band reports thus far from New York, 33% were jakes, 22% were two-year old gobblers, 22% were 5-year olds and one each was 6 and 7 years old. Of the 5 leg banded turkeys reported harvested during the all-day portion of Pennsylvania's season, only one was harvested after noon.

Rocket charges were ordered for the upcoming late summer turkey trapping season when we will leg band an additional 150 hens (75 per Study Area), focusing on brood flocks to obtain a sample of leg-banded juvenile hens. Transmitters recovered from mortalities will be redeployed. The Game Commission thanks the PA Chapter NWTF for continued financial support with this study, purchasing charges and bait used for trapping.

Wild Turkey Management Plan

The annual review of the wild turkey management plan strategies is underway in preparation for discussion during the annual PGC/PANWTF Cooperative meeting (June 18, 2013). Each PGC Bureau is reviewing management plan strategies they are responsible for to show outputs and outcomes from fiscal year 2012, which ends June 30, if the timeframe for accomplishments is being maintained, and identifying potential problems with implementation.

Hunting Related Shooting Incidents (HRSIs)

Preliminary reports show one HRSI from this spring's turkey season, which occurred on May 25, Crawford County, as a result of the hunter failing to positively identify the target. The victim was taken by life-flight helicopter to a local hospital but is subsequently in satisfactory condition. One incident, which will not be reported statistically because it did not involve injury or medical treatment, was reported from Columbia County, April 27. Two people were in a blind and were sprayed with shot from an unknown person. Please note this is a preliminary report. The previous 10-year average (2003-2012) number of HRSIs was 7; with 3 in 2012. The average HRSIs from 1993-2007, when fluorescent orange was required during spring season, was 9. The average HRSIs since the requirement was rescinded was 6, not including 2013.

Information and Education

In cooperation with the Bureau of I&E MJ Casalena updated the wild turkey web page on the Game Commission's website, prepared 2 spring turkey hunting season news releases, provided hunting forecasts for several outdoor writers and individual turkey hunters, responded to more than 30 phone and email inquiries regarding timing of the spring season, turkey hunting and biology/population/habitat management and wild turkey diseases.

WMU 5A Summer Sighting Surveys

With the re-opening of fall turkey season in WMU 5A in 2010, we continue to monitor the turkey population in the Michaux State Forest, where the majority of this WMU's turkey population and harvest exists. Thanks to a well-established cooperative effort among the PGC, DCNR Bureau of Forestry (BOF), and volunteers from local NWTF chapters, the 16th year of weekly Summer Sighting Surveys on the Michaux State Forest are underway to provide an additional index to turkey population trends besides our harvest and hunting success trend data for WMU 5A. This is the area of the turkey radio-telemetry study where we investigated the causes of the suppressed wild turkey population and closed the fall season from 2003 - 2009 to aid in population recovery. Additionally, since 2002, BOF staff record each day, turkeys they see and miles driven within the Michaux State Forest, as an additional index of the turkey population. In 2012 we added two additional weekly turkey survey routes through the valleys east and west of South Mountain to begin assessing the expanding turkey population off the mountain and throughout the remainder of WMU 5A. In all within the WMU there are 8 total weekly surveys, 3 of which are conducted by NWTF local volunteers.