

# NWTF Technical Committee Representatives' Report - PA Chapter NWTF

Board of Directors Meeting, July 27, 2013

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## Harvest Management and 2013 Spring Turkey Hunter Survey

Preliminary spring 2013 harvest results are not yet available. Harvest report cards received to date are 18% above reported harvests from 2012 for the same time period into the spring turkey 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.

This is the second year of the annual spring turkey hunter survey and the first year of the annual mentored youth spring turkey hunter survey. Survey announcements, informing hunters of the website to use for survey completion, were mailed to all respondents of the Game-Take Survey (9,876 adult hunters, 1,168 mentored youth) to determine number and geographic distribution of spring turkey harvest, hunter effort for youth, regular and 2<sup>nd</sup> tag, and mentored youth. Reminder notices were mailed last week to non-respondents requesting them to complete the paper survey and return via postal mail. To date we have received responses from 70% of the regular spring turkey hunter survey recipients and 59% of the mentored youth spring turkey hunter survey recipients.

A record number of special wild turkey licenses were sold in 2013, 16,505, which permit hunters to harvest a second bearded turkey during the spring season, beating 2011's high of 15,159. This was 26% higher than last year (13,142), whereas general license sales were only 10% higher than last year. I'm not sure why sales increased that dramatically. Since the 2009-10 license year hunters may purchase the license at the time of general license sales, until the day before the regular spring season begins.

## Wild Turkey Hen Harvest Rates and Annual Survival Rates Study

As part of the hen turkey harvest and survival rate study, we continue to coordinate with PGC regions and the Pennsylvania Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (PCFWRU) to monitor survival and movements of leg-banded and transmittered hens. We continue to monitor survival of 38 satellite transmittered hens (19 in each Study Area). No mortalities have been recorded for the last month now that hens have mostly completed nesting. However, satellite data show that several transmittered hens continue to display nest incubation behavior due to lost broods, lost nests or perhaps double-clutching. A transmitter in Study Area 2 (Centre County) that we lost contact with last August re-established satellite contact again and was retrieved, but the hen appeared to have been dead for months. The transmitter will be returned to the manufacturer to determine cause of it malfunctioning.

We received 35 total leg band reports for the spring season, including two bearded hens. Age and sex composition, were similar to other years, 5% bearded females, 22% juvenile males (jakes) and 73% adult gobblers. Since the end of the spring hunting season we have received 3 reports to our toll-free legband reporting phone line of legbands from hen wild turkeys, one of which was a roadkill. Information regarding the others is pending.

Nesting analyses of satellite transmittered hens show that the median date of nest incubation was May 4 in Study Area 1 (WMUs 2C, 2E, 4A, 4B & 4D) and May 2 in Study Area 2 (WMUs 2F, 2G & 2H), but the spring hunting season opened April 27; 5 to 7 days prior to the median of nest incubation. The season opens the Saturday closest to May 1 in an attempt to open in conjunction with the median

of nest incubation in most years. During 3 of the past 4 years the season has opened a few days to one week prior to nest incubation.

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation is conducting a similar hen wild turkey survival and harvest rate study, and the Missouri Department of Conservation is initiating a general wild turkey survival, harvest rate and reproductive study. Both states have modeled their studies after the PGC's recent and current studies and we are providing information and technical assistance to these agencies as requested.

We provided framed certificates of appreciation to landowners who permitted us to trap wild turkeys on their property for the hen study. Landowners were very appreciative of the recognition.

In cooperation with our Survey and Statistical Support Section we analyzed results of the 2012 fall wild turkey hunter survey, which was mailed to 10,000 general license holders after the fall 2012 season. Results were similar to the 2011 and 2010 surveys with existing turkey hunters generally satisfied with the additional recreational opportunity of the Thanksgiving holiday season segment, but non-turkey hunters may simply be too busy to take advantage of this opportunity. Fewer hunters participated in both season segments this year than last, which could be a function of hunter success during the 1<sup>st</sup> segment due to a season bag limit of one turkey, and / or related to weather conditions.

### **Wild Turkey Management Plan**

The annual PGC/PANWTF Cooperative meeting was held on June 18, 2013. Fourteen topics were discussed including the annual review of the Wild Turkey Management Plan. In cooperation with all Bureaus we reviewed the 47 strategies in the 10-year Wild Turkey Management Plan (2006-2015), and 78% of the strategies are either completed or in progress. Eighteen Action Items were identified.

### **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, submitted an article for the October Game News regarding the hen wild turkey study and the reasons for the changes to fall turkey hunting seasons, responded to more than 18 phone and email inquiries, and provided 2 educational presentations.

### **Summer Sighting Surveys**

The statewide summer turkey sighting survey conducted daily by all Wildlife Conservation Officers continues through August, as well as the weekly WMU 5A surveys conducted by PGC and BOF staff as well as NWTF volunteers. Sightings in WMU 5A during the month of June were the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest (73.7 turkeys seen/1,000 miles driven) since we began weekly surveys in 1998. The record for June sightings was set in 2011 (82.8) and second was 2007 (75.7).