



## SOUTH CAROLINA WOODCOCK HUNTER SURVEY 2025-2026



The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Small Game Project implemented the South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey for the 2025-26 hunting season. This survey was designed to collect quantitative information about woodcock numbers and hunter success across the state. Future surveys will compare the results to past years to identify trends in woodcock populations and woodcock hunting activities in South Carolina.

### METHODS

Individuals contacted for this woodcock hunter survey included respondents from the previous year's quail and rabbit hunter surveys. Potential survey cooperators were also solicited through public presentations and events, the SCDNR website and social media accounts, and flyers at WMA kiosks. In addition, hunters were provided the opportunity to sign-up to participate online and given the option of downloading a hunt report form or reporting their hunts directly using their computer or mobile device. Hunters interested in participating in this annual event can sign up at <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/smallgame.html> .

Hunters participating via postal service were provided with data sheets, instructions, and self-addressed stamped envelopes prior to the start of the 2025-26 woodcock hunting season. All cooperators were asked to keep accurate records of their hunting activities and to provide the following information about each individual hunt: date and county of hunt, number of hunters, number of hours hunted, number of woodcock flushed, and number of woodcock harvested.

Additional information requested included number of quail coveys flushed and rabbits jumped, the sex of woodcock bagged during the season, and comments on dog performance and season quality. Cooperators could also provide general comments, such as information on food habits, weather, and habitat conditions. Cooperators also had the opportunity to return wings from harvested woodcock, which can be used to estimate sex and age ratios. Cooperators who participated via mail were provided with a postage-paid return envelope and tags to affix to each wing with the date, county, and sex of the bird. Cooperators who participated online could email to request tags and a prepaid envelope to mail in wings.

A period of 60 days following the end of hunting season was allowed for hunters to respond at which time data were analyzed by geographic region and statewide.

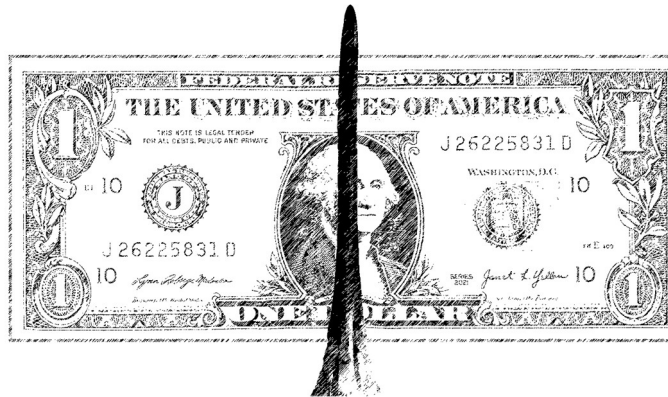
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Statewide

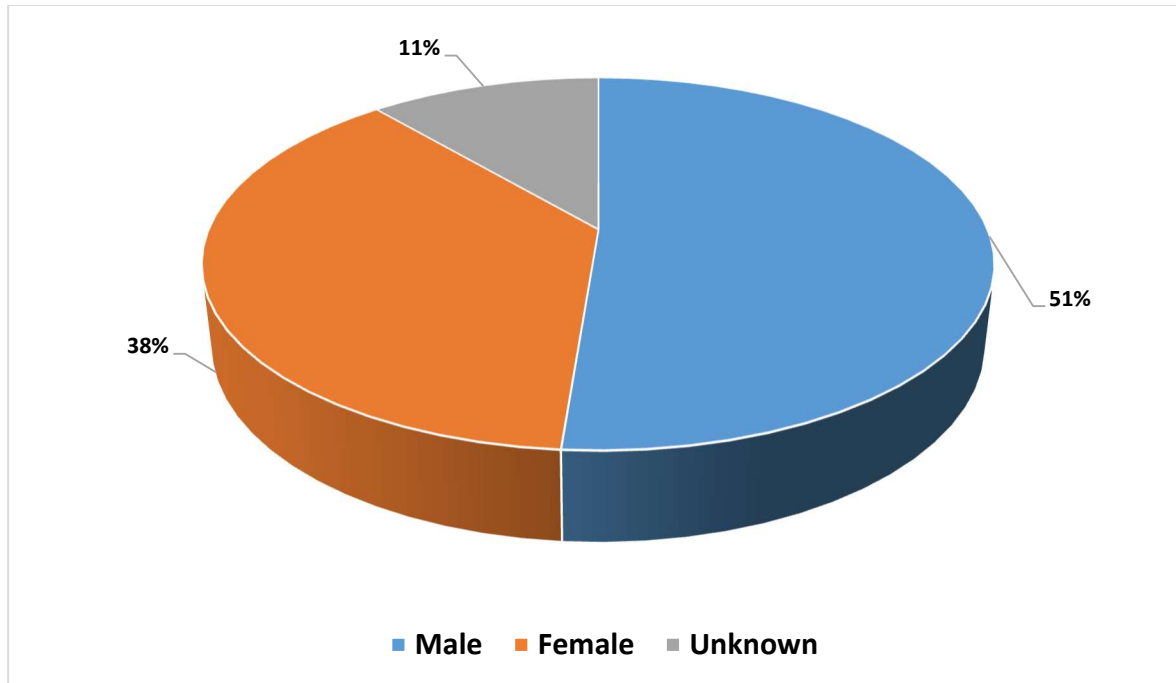
A total of 22 individuals responded to the survey with usable data. Survey cooperators recorded 70 hunts and logged 140.5 hours during these hunts. Participants averaged 3.2 hunting trips during the 2025-26 season. Hunting parties averaged 1.5 hunters per trip and the average hunt length was 2 hours. Based on this information, survey cooperators and their companions expended an average of 3 man-hours/hunt (233 total man-hours) in pursuit of woodcock.

Hunting parties flushed an average of 2.05 woodcock per hour and harvested 0.58 woodcock per hour. Based on our survey, 28.5% of woodcock flushed were harvested.

Cooperators were also asked to report the sex of any woodcock harvested. Male and female woodcock can be differentiated by size and bill length, with female woodcock being larger and heavier and having longer bills. A quick way to estimate sex of harvested woodcock is measuring the bill length against a dollar bill, demonstrated in figure 1. Female woodcock typically have bills that are 2.6 inches (68 mm) or longer, which is the width of a dollar bill. If you insert the width of a dollar bill into the beak and it is the same length or longer it is likely a female and if it is shorter it is a male. 51% of woodcock harvested were reported as male, 38% as female, and 11% as unknown (Figure 2).



**Figure 1. How to measure a woodcock bill against the width of a dollar bill to determine if the bird is male or female. If the bill is the same length or longer it is likely female, if it is shorter it is male.**



**Figure 2. Percentage of male and female woodcock harvested, South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey 2025-26.**

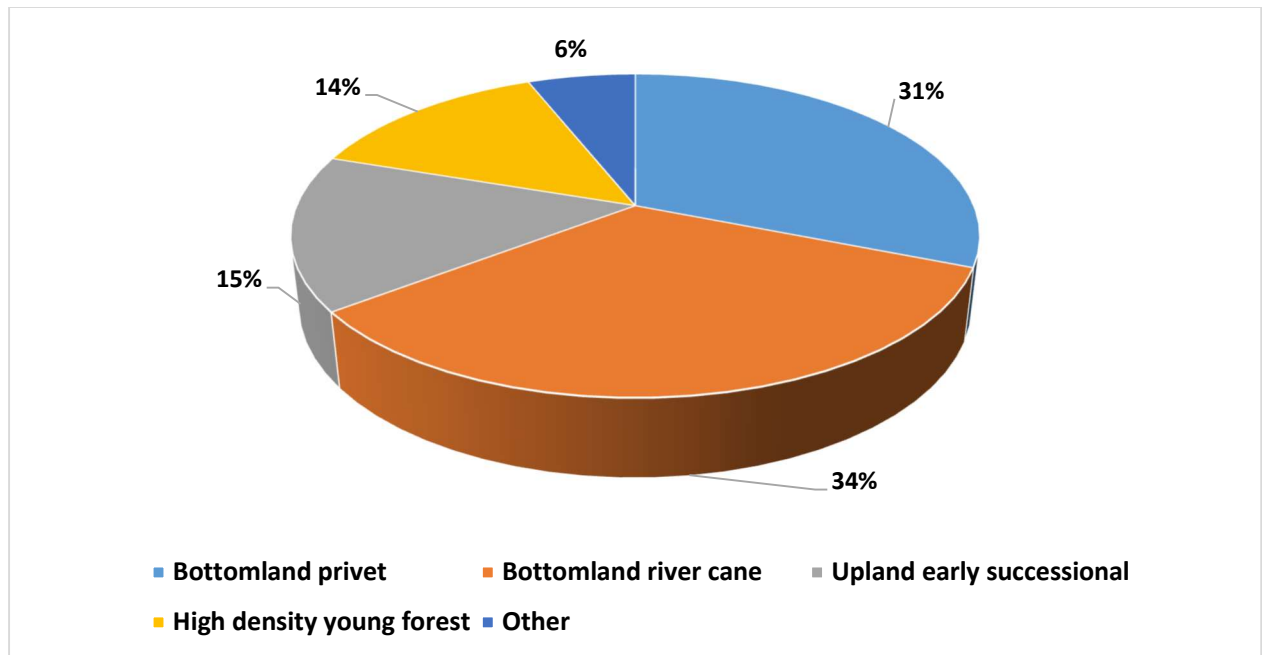
Participants were asked to report whether they hunted on private land, state managed land, or other public land. Of the hunters who responded, the majority (57%) were on state managed public land, followed by 27% on other public land and 16% on private lands. Table 1 summarizes the hunting metrics on private versus public land for the 2025-26 season. Hunters reported slightly higher flush rates per hour (2.08) and harvest rates per hour (0.62) on public lands. On private lands, hunting parties flushed an average of 1.85 woodcock per hour and harvested 0.36 woodcock per hour.

**Table 1. Statewide hunting metrics on private versus public land from the South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey, 2025-26.**

Land Type	# of Hunts	% of Hunts	Hours Hunted	Woodcock Flushed	Woodcock Harvested	Woodcock Flushed/Hour	Woodcock Harvested/Hour
Private	11	16%	19.5	36	7	1.85	0.36
Public	59	84%	121	252	75	2.08	0.62

Statewide, 0.009 quail coveys were flushed per hour and 0.04 rabbits were jumped per hour. In total, 2 flushed coveys and 5 jumped rabbits were reported

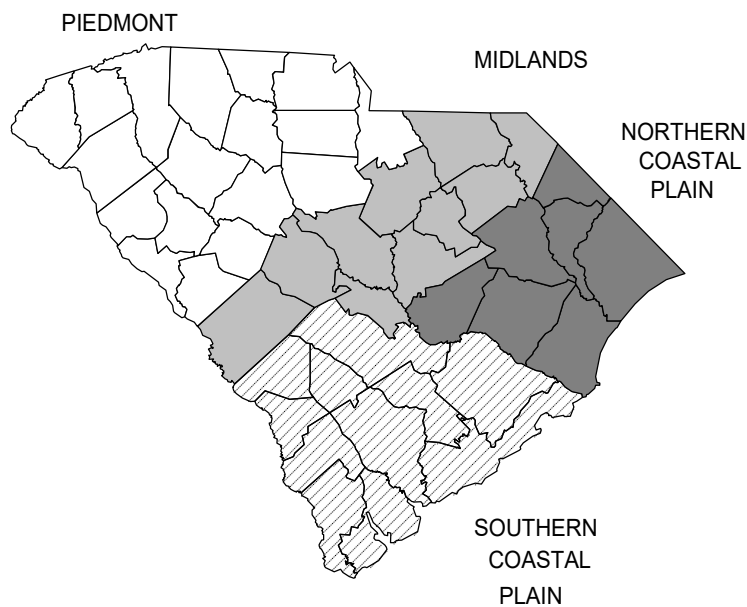
Cooperators spent the most time (39%) in bottomland river cane in pursuit of woodcock, followed by bottomland privet (36%) (Figure 3). Other habitats hunted included rhododendron, old hardwoods, and mountain creek bottoms.



**Figure 3. Percentage of habitat types used by hunters in pursuit of woodcock, South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey, 2025-26.**

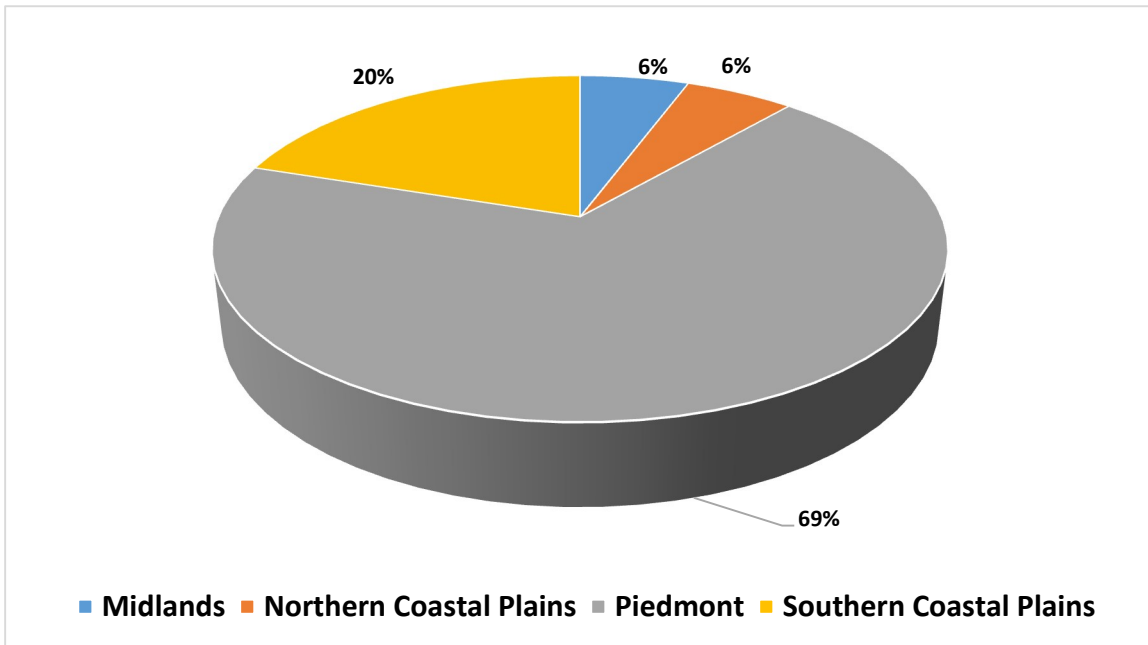
### Regional Comparisons

South Carolina is divided into four broad geographic regions (Figure 4) based on habitat. The "Piedmont" encompasses about 1/3 of the state and includes the mountain and foothills areas. The "Midlands" extends on a broad northeast/southwest axis across the upper coastal plain of the state. The "Pee Dee" region is located on the northern lower coastal plain and the "Lowcountry" is situated in the southern lower coastal plain.

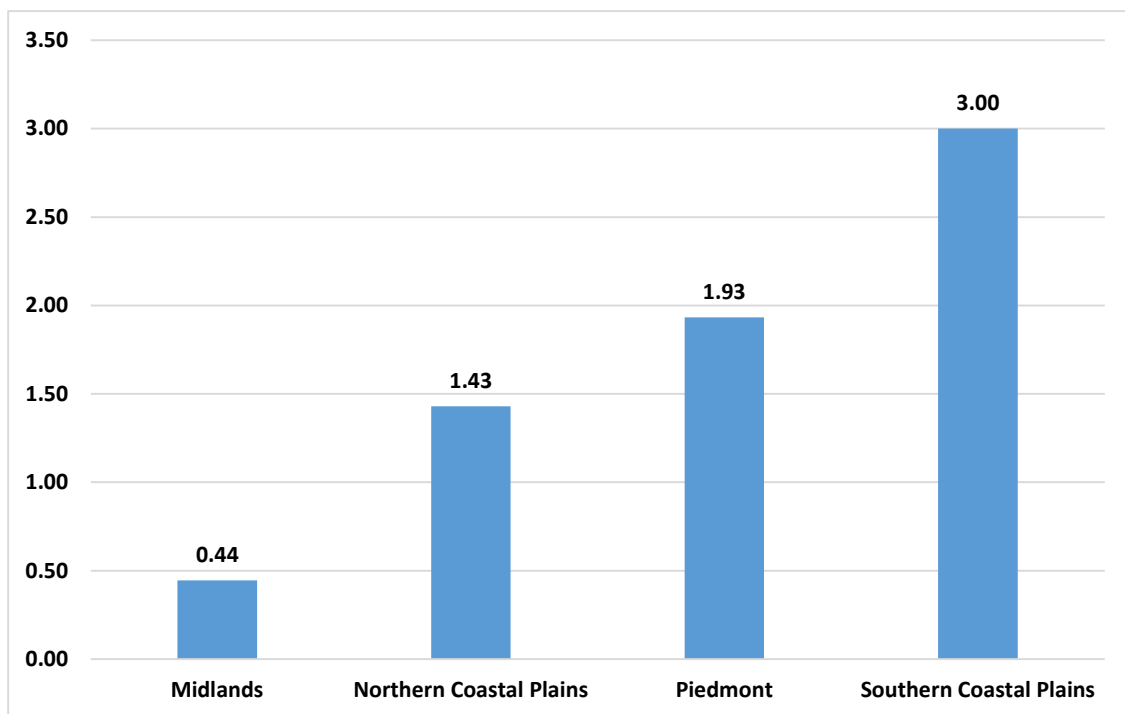


**Figure 4. Physiographic regions of South Carolina, South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey.**

Based on number of hunts reported, hunting effort was highest in the Piedmont, followed by the Southern Coastal Plains (Figure 5). The highest average woodcock flushing rate per hour was recorded in the Southern Coastal Plains (3), followed by the Piedmont (1.93) (Figure 6).



**Figure 5. Percentage of woodcock hunts by region, South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey, 2025-26.**



**Figure 6. Average number of woodcock flushed per hour by region, South Carolina Woodcock Hunter Survey, 2025-26.**

## **Wing Data**

Cooperators had the opportunity to provide wings from harvested birds. One survey participant provided usable wings, for a response rate of 4.5%. Age information was obtained from wings to assess the age ratio. A total of 11 wings were provided. Of the 11 wings, 5 were from adults, 5 from juveniles, and 1 could not be determined. This results in an age ratio of 1 juvenile per adult, though with such a low reporting rate, this estimate is likely not a reliable representation.

## **COOPERATOR COMMENTS**

Twenty-two hunters provided a rating for the 2025-26 woodcock hunting season. Of these, 11 rated the season as good, 9 as fair, and 2 as poor. Of the twenty hunters reporting their dog performance, 14 had a rating as good, 4 as fair, and 2 as poor.

Several hunters left comments about good habitat. One hunter mentioned seeing a strong reemergence of privet stands that were damaged during Hurricane Helene and lots of blow down cover. Several hunters mentioned that the bird seemed to be found in the thickest privet patches. In December, weather related comments indicated that conditions were dry, warm, and windy, while in January, cooperators wrote about cold, windy days.

## **SUMMARY**

The 2025-26 Woodcock Hunter Survey marks the 1<sup>st</sup> year of data collection for a statewide survey of woodcock populations and woodcock hunter success in South Carolina. Plans are to continue this survey during the 2026-27 season. Increasing the number of participants would help to increase the reporting accuracy.

If you are aware of someone who hunts woodcock but does not participate in this survey, please encourage them to do so. Potential cooperators should contact the SCDNR Small Game Project at 803-734-3941 or [pesis@dnr.sc.gov](mailto:pesis@dnr.sc.gov).

**A reminder for next year: Data cannot be entered without hunter name and address or if all hunts are submitted as one entry.**