ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES ON

ACT 51 123rd SESSION OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2019)

Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2025

January 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Act 51 of the 123rd Session of the South Carolina General Assembly largely rewrote wild turkey hunting laws in South Carolina. It established new turkey season frameworks, imposed a limit of one gobbler during the first 10 days of the season, a daily limit of one gobbler, and it imposed a first-time fee on turkey tags. Act 51 also requires that "The department shall provide an annual report on the wild turkey resources in South Carolina to the Chairman of the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee and the Chairman of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee." The following is offered by the department to fulfill that requirement.

The popularity and status of the Eastern wild turkey in South Carolina drives the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Wildlife Section's ongoing commitment to conduct pertinent research, surveys and monitoring related to the state's wild turkey population. Due to the importance of turkeys as a state resource, SCDNR believes that accurately assessing the productivity, harvest, as well as hunter participation in turkey hunting, is key to the management of this species.

Agencies and legislators are faced with the daunting task of designing and recommending regulatory frameworks that maximize hunter satisfaction while ensuring that populations are sustainable. Proposed changes in turkey-related laws and regulations should have foundations in biology, therefore, the population dynamics associated with annual reproduction and hunting mortality must be monitored and reported. Similarly, when issues arise that do not involve biological parameters, it is important to have information related to turkey hunter activities afield because they also form an important basis for managing wild turkeys.

The objectives of annual survey and monitoring are to obtain valid estimates of: (1) noncompliance with electronic harvest reporting through SC Game Check, (2) hunting effort related to turkeys, (3) information on hunters' opinions of the turkey resource and other aspects of turkey hunting, and (4) annual reproduction and recruitment of wild turkeys in South Carolina.

Wildlife biologists and managers in South Carolina and throughout the range of the Eastern wild turkey have observed and reported declines in productivity, likely attributable to large-scale declines in nest success and brood survival. Likewise, declines in turkey abundance, and corresponding declines in spring harvest of males have been noted. Collectively, these findings are of considerable concern to state wildlife agencies, like SCDNR, charged with ensuring sustainable populations of wild turkeys. During July and August of 2023 SCDNR hosted a series of five public meetings around the state to discuss the concerns and options for future management to address these declines. A report on this effort was provided to the legislature in December of 2023 leading to Act 224 which marked the third wild turkey season and bag limit change since 2015.

To quantify, South Carolina has experienced declines in turkey productivity since 1988. Average recruitment prior to 1988 was 3.5 poults per hen. Average recruitment since then has been 2.1, representing a 40 percent decrease in average recruitment. Coincidentally, the turkey harvest has decreased nearly 50 percent since it peaked in 2002.

The declines, here and in other states, have precipitated numerous research projects over the last decade. This research has been conducted by several universities across the Southeast, with assistance and primary funding from state wildlife agencies. SCDNR has and continues to support and participate in these studies. Over time, the agency hopes to gain a better understanding of the factors influencing turkey declines, and methods, techniques, and management strategies to slow or reverse this trend. This research entails a comprehensive assessment of reproductive ecology and chronology of male and female wild turkeys. This includes studies of timing, location and success of nesting and brood rearing activity. Projects also investigate survival, behavioral and movement data, demographic parameters, gobbling activity, and descriptions of mate selection and parentage for populations of wild turkeys.

Summaries of current research can be found within this report.

Noncompliance with mandatory harvest reporting, hunter participation and hunter effort are estimated by means of an annual post season online turkey hunter survey. Hunters are surveyed randomly by selecting 30,000 individuals who received a set of 2025 Turkey Transportation Tags which are required to hunt turkeys in South Carolina. During the 2025 spring season the noncompliance corrected reported harvest was 10,419 gobblers. This figure represents a 16 percent decrease from the estimated harvest in 2024 (12,428). Recent turkey harvest figures remain well below levels from the past reflecting decreased numbers of turkeys likely due to ongoing poor recruitment of poults into the population. This trend appears to be a regional situation and has been called the “southeast turkey decline” by biologists and managers.

Wild turkey productivity is assessed by observations of reproduction and associated survival of offspring being recruited into the population. This measure of young entering the population based on the number of hens in the population is the Total Recruitment Ratio (TRR). This annual index is the most practical measure of productivity because it considers successful hens, unsuccessful hens, and poult survival. Recruitment of four or more poults per hen is considered excellent, three is good, two is fair and considered a break-even point, and less than two poults per hen is poor. During 2025 statewide Total Recruitment Ratio was 1.7 which was better than the 5-year average but should be considered poor. For hens that successfully raised a brood, average brood size was 3.7 poults, a number that has remained consistent over time. However, the driving factor in the low productivity is the high percentage of hens with no poults at all by late summer. Fifty-three percent of hens observed during the 2025 survey had no poults and that figure has averaged 58 percent in the last five years.

The current estimated population of wild turkeys in South Carolina is approximately 84,000. This is based on a hen to gobbler ratio of 1.43:1 derived from the 2025 Summer Turkey Survey, the noncompliance corrected reported harvest of 10,419 gobblers during spring 2025 and a 40 percent male harvest rate. Male harvest rate is based on long-term average disparity in hen to gobbler ratio which can only be explained by differential mortality between the sexes, in this case attributed to hunter harvest.

Additional details and discussion on the annual harvest and productivity surveys are found within this report.

2025 SC WILD TURKEY HARVEST REPORT

Introduction

Ranking only behind white-tailed deer in popularity among hunters, the Eastern wild turkey is an important natural resource in South Carolina. The 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey represents the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), Wildlife Section's ongoing commitment to conduct pertinent research related to the state's wild turkey population. The primary objectives of this survey research were to obtain valid estimates of: (1) noncompliance with electronic harvest reporting through SC Game Check and (2) hunting effort related to turkeys. Information on hunters' opinions of the turkey resource and other aspects of turkey hunting are also presented.

Due to the importance of turkeys as a state resource, SCDNR believes that accurately assessing the harvest of turkeys, as well as hunter participation in turkey hunting, is key to the management of this species. Proposed changes in turkey-related laws and regulations should have foundations in biology, therefore, the population dynamics associated with annual hunting mortality cannot be ignored. Similarly, when issues arise that do not involve biological parameters, it is important to have information related to turkey hunter activities afield because they too form an important basis for managing wild turkeys.

Since the inception of the Statewide Turkey Restoration and Research Project (Turkey Project) the methods used to document the turkey harvest have changed. Historically, turkey harvest figures were developed using a system of mandatory turkey check stations across the state. This system yielded an actual count of harvested turkeys and was, therefore, an absolute minimum figure. Shortcomings in this system included deterioration in compliance, complaints from hunters regarding the inconvenience of check stations, etc. The requirement to physically check harvested turkeys in South Carolina was eliminated following the 2005 season at which time post season hunter surveys were implemented. In 2021 mandatory electronic harvest reporting for turkeys began using SC Game Check. Now, data from SC Game Check is combined with data from the online turkey hunter survey to produce the annual turkey harvest report. SCDNR thanks hunters for their diligence in supporting the SC Game Check program which provides modern data that assists in properly managing the turkey resource in South Carolina.

Survey Methodology

The 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey was directed at 30,000 randomly selected turkey tag holders with email addresses other than youth under 16 years old. Youth under 16 were not included because laws prevent contacting youths without parental or guardian consent. The questionnaire for the 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey was developed by Big Game Program staff. The survey process began with an initial email notification of the impending survey, an initial survey, and two reminders directed at individuals who had yet to complete the survey. Statistical analysis was conducted using Statistix 10 (Analytical Software, Tallahassee, FL).

Acknowledgments

Thanks to South Carolina turkey hunters. Funding for this report, as well as all activities related to the

Statewide Turkey Research and Management Project, is made possible through revenue generated from the turkey tag program which is earmarked for tag administration, research, management, harvest reporting, and habitat management. As a result, no state funds are associated with this program.

Results and Discussion

Excluding failed messages and messages that bounced (1,396) a total of 28,604 email addresses were reached. A total of 7,531 surveys were started with 7,429 surveys being completed for a response rate of 26 percent.

Harvest Reporting Noncompliance

One of the primary goals of the 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey was to estimate noncompliance with mandatory harvest reporting through SC Game Check. This was accomplished in two ways. First, participants who indicated they harvested turkeys were asked how many of the turkeys they harvested were reported. Second, by cross-referencing the responses with reporting data an estimate was obtained of the percentage of individuals who said they reported but did not. Combining these estimates yielded a noncompliance rate of approximately 17.4 percent. This noncompliance rate was then used to correct the reported harvest and is presented in this report as the noncompliance corrected reported harvest.

Turkey Harvest

During the 2025 spring season the noncompliance corrected reported harvest was 10,419 gobblers (Table 1). This figure represents a 16 percent decrease from the estimated harvest in 2024 (12,428). Recent turkey harvest figures remain well below levels from the past reflecting decreased numbers of turkeys likely due to ongoing poor recruitment of poults into the population (Figures 1 and 2). This trend appears to be a regional situation and has been called the “southeast turkey decline” by biologists and managers.

Additionally, substantial legislative changes were in place during the 2025 spring gobbler season that were for the purpose of moderating the turkey harvest. The bag limit was reduced from 3 to 2, the harvest of jakes was prohibited for all hunters, and there were 9 fewer days in the season. During 2024 592 jakes were harvested and there were approximately 1,200 turkeys taken during the 9 additional days of the season. This represents about 1,800 turkeys and if combined with the 10,419 birds taken in 2025 it would equal just over 12,000 turkeys which is almost exactly the number of birds taken in 2024. This intentional decrease in harvest is an effort to improve turkey reproductive success and ultimately turkey numbers across the state.

Harvest Per Unit Area County Rankings

Comparisons can be made between turkey harvests from the various counties in South Carolina if a harvest per unit area is established. Harvest per unit area standardizes the harvest among counties regardless of the size of individual counties. One measure of harvest rate is the number of turkeys taken per square mile (640ac. = 1 mile^2). When considering the estimated turkey habitat that is available in South Carolina, the turkey harvest rate in 2054 was 0.5 gobblers per square mile statewide (Table 2). Although this harvest rate is not as high as it once was, it should be considered good and is like other Southeastern states. The top counties for harvest per unit area were Bamberg (1.0 turkeys/mile^2), and a tie between Marion, Colleton, Spartanburg, Florence, Orangeburg, and Williamsburg (0.7 turkeys/mile^2) (Table 2).

Turkey Harvest Rankings by County

Total turkey harvest is not comparable among counties because there is no standard unit of comparison, i.e., counties vary in size and are, therefore, not directly comparable. However, some readers may be interested in this type of ranking. The top 5 counties during 2024 were, Colleton, Williamsburg, Berkeley, Orangeburg, and Flornce (Table 3). Four of these counties were in the top 5 in 2024.

Number of Turkey Hunters

Even though all individuals receiving a set of turkey tags were eligible to hunt turkeys, only 58 percent indicated that they actually hunted turkeys. Based on this figure, approximately 41,805 hunters participated in the 2025 spring turkey season, an 11 percent decrease from 2024 (47,007). Counties with the highest estimates for individual hunters include Berkeley, Fairfield, Laurens, Newberry, and Union (Table 4). Four of these counties were in the top 5 in 2024.

Hunter Effort

For the purposes of this survey hunter effort was measured in days with one day being defined as any portion of the day spent afield. Turkey hunters averaged approximately 7 days afield during the 2025 season (Table 4). Successful hunters averaged more days afield (8.3 days) than unsuccessful hunters (6.1 days). Extrapolating to the entire population of turkey hunters yields a figure of 205,605 total days of spring gobbler hunting, a 16 percent decrease from 2024 (245,845 days). This 16 percent reduction in effort corresponds exactly with the 16 percent reduction in harvest. The top 5 South Carolina counties for overall days of turkey hunting during 2025 were Berkeley, Fairfield, Union, Newberry, and Laurens. Three of these counties were in the top 5 in 2024 (Table 4).

Turkey Harvest by Period of Season

Substantial legislative changes were in place during the 2025 spring gobbler season that were for the purpose of moderating the turkey harvest. The bag limit was reduced from 3 to 2, the harvest of jakes was prohibited for all hunters, and there were 9 fewer days in the season. Additionally, the opening date of the season (April 3) was later to decrease potential negative effects on reproduction related to the early excessive removal of males. Two recent multi-year nesting studies conducted in South Carolina indicate that average nest initiation by hens is April 9. Nesting studies have also been conducted in Georgia, Louisiana (2), and North Carolina (3) with similar findings.

Past earlier opening dates (March 15, 20, 22, and April 1) led to between 45 and 60 percent of the gobbler harvest occurring prior to nest initiation. Although the season opening date was later in 2025, 44 percent of the harvest still occurred prior to nest initiation (Figure 3). Opening day was responsible for 12 percent of the harvest and the 1,275 birds taken were the most ever reported through SC Game Check in a single day. Thirty-two (32) percent of the harvest occurred in the first 4 days of the season, the 5 Saturdays during the season contributed 26 percent to the total harvest, and 4 percent of the harvest occurred on the youth turkey hunting days.

Hunting Success

For determination of hunting success only those individuals who hunted turkeys were included in the analysis and similarly, success was defined as harvesting at least one turkey. Overall hunting success in 2025 was 28 percent. Unlike deer hunting which typically has high success, turkey hunting can be an

inherently unsuccessful endeavor, relatively speaking.

The statewide bag limit in South Carolina is 2 gobblers. Obviously, most successful hunters harvest only one bird (20%). However, it is interesting to note the relative contribution to the total harvest by the few hunters who harvest 2 birds. Ironically, the percentage of hunters taking 2 birds was only 8 percent, however, this small percentage of hunters combined to harvest an estimated 44 percent of the total birds taken in the state. Finally, based on reports to SC Game Check, hunters from 38 states and the District of Columbia reported a turkey harvest. However, nonresidents comprised only 10 percent of the overall harvest in 2025. Nonresidents from Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina accounted for 69 percent of the nonresident harvest.

Hunter Opinion Regarding Turkey Numbers

As has become customary, the 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey asked participants to compare the number of turkeys in the area they hunt most often with the number of turkeys in past years. Participants were given 3 choices: increasing, about the same, or decreasing. Approximately 45 percent of hunters indicated that the number of turkeys in the area they hunted most often was about the same as in past years. A higher percentage of hunters (42 percent) believed that the turkey population was decreasing than increasing (13 percent). On a scale of 1 to 3 with 1 being increasing, 2 being the same, and 3 being decreasing, the overall mean rating of 2.3 suggests that hunters viewed the turkey population as decreasing. The opinion among hunters that the turkey population is decreasing has been consistent the last few years.

Turkeys Shot but not Recovered

Harvesting game signals the end of a successful hunt and although most hunters do a good job of preparing their equipment and mental state, it goes without saying that a certain percentage of game is shot or shot at and not killed or recovered. This point is no different when turkey hunting.

To estimate the prevalence of errant shots at turkeys, the 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey asked hunters to indicate the number of turkeys they "shot but did not kill or recover during the 2025 season in South Carolina." Approximately 9 percent of hunters indicated that they shot but did not kill or recover at least one turkey in 2025 (9 percent in 2024). There were approximately 41,805 turkey hunters in 2025 meaning that approximately 3,600 turkeys were shot or shot at and not killed or recovered. Therefore, approximately 26 percent of the total turkeys shot at were not killed or recovered. These results have been consistent since this type of data have been available with the long-term average of birds "shot at but not killed or recovered" about 22 percent for the last decade.

Thes data are certainly not indicative of "dead and unrecovered turkeys," however, some percentage of the 3,600 turkeys that were shot at did die. Although shot shells for turkeys have become increasingly sophisticated, accurate, and lethal it is a fact that the pattern of a shotgun is relatively broad and contains hundreds of pellets. Therefore, a "clean miss" is not as clear-cut for turkeys compared to other big game like deer where there is typically a single projectile. Additional research is needed on this topic.

Turkey Harvest in the Morning vs. Afternoon

The typical spring turkey hunt is characterized by attempting to locate a gobbling bird prior to or just after sunrise. Once a gobbler is located most hunters position themselves as close as they can to the gobbler without scaring it away. Various types of callers that mimic the sounds of wild turkeys are then used to attempt to call the gobbler into gun range. This technique of locating a gobbling bird, setting up, and calling is repeated as necessary.

Traditionally, spring turkey hunting was primarily carried out during the first few hours of the day. As the popularity of turkey hunting has increased, many hunters now hunt in the afternoon as well. Gobblers are generally not as vocal in the afternoon, but can be stimulated to gobble using the various turkey calls, particularly late in the afternoon near areas where turkeys frequently roost. Additionally, it is now common for hunters to set up on food plots, often in blinds, using decoys in areas that turkeys frequent for feeding and loafing in the afternoon.

To gain a better understanding of the distribution of harvest with respect to time of day, reporting data from SC Game Check was queried to determine the number of birds harvested in the morning compared to the afternoon. Results indicate that approximately 79 percent of gobblers were harvested in the morning compared to 21 percent in the afternoon. These data may be useful if discussions arise concerning the relative importance of morning compared to afternoon harvest of gobblers in the spring. Results have been consistent since this type of data has been available with the long-term average of birds taken in the afternoon about 23 percent for the last decade.

Turkey Harvest on Private vs. Public (WMA) Land

To gain an understanding of the relative importance of the turkey harvest on private versus public (WMA) land, data from SC Game Check was queried to determine the type of land (private or public) where turkeys were reportedly taken. Data indicate that approximately 91 percent of birds were taken on private land and 9 percent on public (WMA) land. Interestingly, public land comprises only about 7 percent of the turkey habitat in the state. Therefore, although a relatively small proportion of the total harvest occurred on public land, it slightly outperformed what would be expected based on available habitat.

With electronic reporting of harvested wild turkeys through SC Game Check now required, harvest figures for individual WMA's are now available (Table 5). Based on these reports, the noncompliance corrected reported harvest was 885 turkeys taken on the various WMAs in 2025 (1,089 in 2024). The harvest of turkeys on WMAs is included in the statewide harvest figures presented in Table 1.

Turkey Harvest on Youth Weekends

For several years there has been a Youth Turkey Hunting Weekend on the Saturday and Sunday prior to the regular season opening date. Legislation effective in 2025 added a second Youth Turkey Hunting Weekend on the Saturday and Sunday following the close of the regular season. In 2025 the noncompliance corrected reported harvest on the 2 youth weekends was 430 turkeys with 405 and 25 being taken on the preseason and postseason weekends, respectfully.

Harvest Reporting Methods

SC Game Check Provides 3 methods to report: the Go Outdoors SC smartphone app, on the SCDNR website, by phone or text using the toll-free SC Game Check number. SC Game Check on the Go Outdoors SC smartphone app was by far the most popular reporting method (89%), followed by online (6%), and phone/text (5%).

Taking Other People Turkey Hunting

It is well known that a turkey hunt often involves more than one hunter. To determine the reason a hunter takes someone else with them, the 2025 Online Turkey Hunter Survey asked respondents if they took someone else hunting and if so, what were the circumstances. Overall 49 percent of respondents indicated that they took someone else hunting during the 2025 season. Approximately 10 percent indicated they took someone because they harvested the one gobbler allowed during the first week of the season, 6 percent indicated they took someone because they had tagged-out, 40 percent indicated they took a youth hunting, and 45 percent indicated they took an inexperienced person hunting. Approximately 22 percent of hunters who took someone else hunting provided no reason and it is assumed these were simply individuals hunting with friends. Note that the combined percentages are greater than 100 because some individuals indicated multiple reasons for taking someone hunting.

List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
1	Reported statewide turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance	11
2	County rankings based on reported turkey harvest per unit area in South Carolina in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance	12
3	County rankings based on total reported turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance	13
4	Estimated number of turkey hunters, average days hunted, and total hunting effort by county in South Carolina in 2025	14
5	Wildlife Management Area (WMA) reported turkey harvest in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance	15

List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
1	Spring wild turkey harvest in South Carolina 1982-2025	16
2	Summer wild turkey recruitment ratio in South Carolina 1982-2025	16
3	Daily reported turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance	17

.

Table 1. Estimated statewide turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2025.

County	Acres*	Square Miles	Total Harvest	Harvest Rates	
				Ac/Turkey	Turkey/Mi.^{2}
Abbeville	223,113	349	127	1,760	0.4
Aiken	500,546	782	141	3,553	0.2
Allendale	216,455	338	196	1,104	0.6
Anderson	219,068	342	174	1,261	0.5
Bamberg	196,573	307	298	659	1.0
Barnwell	281,764	440	107	2,637	0.2
Beaufort	147,441	230	45	3,305	0.2
Berkeley	567,530	887	528	1,074	0.6
Calhoun	190,584	298	139	1,376	0.5
Charleston	288,732	451	263	1,098	0.6
Cherokee	156,664	245	150	1,043	0.6
Chester	300,589	470	183	1,641	0.4
Chesterfield	372,478	582	235	1,586	0.4
Clarendon	298,087	466	282	1,058	0.6
Colleton	502,666	785	558	901	0.7
Darlington	286,228	447	163	1,754	0.4
Dillon	214,069	334	140	1,532	0.4
Dorchester	302,717	473	301	1,007	0.6
Edgefield	246,543	385	160	1,544	0.4
Fairfield	384,607	601	269	1,431	0.4
Florence	397,888	622	431	923	0.7
Georgetown	399,638	624	264	1,513	0.4
Greenville	294,257	460	256	1,150	0.6
Greenwood	204,400	319	115	1,777	0.4
Hampton	324,840	508	244	1,330	0.5
Horry	533,336	833	419	1,273	0.5
Jasper	309,889	484	195	1,590	0.4
Kershaw	360,485	563	175	2,061	0.3
Lancaster	266,382	416	151	1,759	0.4
Laurens	317,916	497	249	1,277	0.5
Lee	220,106	344	163	1,349	0.5
Lexington	280,742	439	47	5,978	0.1
McCormick	212,021	331	95	2,230	0.3
Marion	216,907	339	248	876	0.7
Marlboro	281,271	439	157	1,788	0.4
Newberry	317,761	497	204	1,556	0.4
Oconee	284,348	444	155	1,835	0.3
Orangeburg	504,516	788	522	966	0.7
Pickens	219,926	344	143	1,535	0.4
Richland	340,121	531	148	2,299	0.3
Saluda	192,173	300	90	2,126	0.3
Spartanburg	265,939	416	292	910	0.7
Sumter	338,968	530	290	1,169	0.5
Union	258,111	403	241	1,072	0.6
Williamsburg	513,851	803	529	970	0.7
York	276,650	432	137	2,014	0.3
Total	**14,028,896**	**21,920**	**10,419**	**1,346**	**0.5**

* Acreage shown represents the acreage of forested land and acreage of row crops considered to be significant turkey habitat within each county.

Table 2. County rankings based on turkey harvest per unit area in South Carolina in 2025.

County	Acres*	Square Miles	Total Harvest	Harvest Rates	
				Ac/Turkey	Turkey/Mi.^{2}
Bamberg	196,573	307	298	659	1.0
Marion	216,907	339	248	876	0.7
Colleton	502,666	785	558	901	0.7
Spartanburg	265,939	416	292	910	0.7
Florence	397,888	622	431	923	0.7
Orangeburg	504,516	788	522	966	0.7
Williamsburg	513,851	803	529	970	0.7
Dorchester	302,717	473	301	1,007	0.6
Cherokee	156,664	245	150	1,043	0.6
Clarendon	298,087	466	282	1,058	0.6
Union	258,111	403	241	1,072	0.6
Berkeley	567,530	887	528	1,074	0.6
Charleston	288,732	451	263	1,098	0.6
Allendale	216,455	338	196	1,104	0.6
Greenville	294,257	460	256	1,150	0.6
Sumter	338,968	530	290	1,169	0.5
Anderson	219,068	342	174	1,261	0.5
Horry	533,336	833	419	1,273	0.5
Laurens	317,916	497	249	1,277	0.5
Hampton	324,840	508	244	1,330	0.5
Lee	220,106	344	163	1,349	0.5
Calhoun	190,584	298	139	1,376	0.5
Fairfield	384,607	601	269	1,431	0.4
Georgetown	399,638	624	264	1,513	0.4
Dillon	214,069	334	140	1,532	0.4
Pickens	219,926	344	143	1,535	0.4
Edgefield	246,543	385	160	1,544	0.4
Newberry	317,761	497	204	1,556	0.4
Chesterfield	372,478	582	235	1,586	0.4
Jasper	309,889	484	195	1,590	0.4
Chester	300,589	470	183	1,641	0.4
Darlington	286,228	447	163	1,754	0.4
Lancaster	266,382	416	151	1,759	0.4
Abbeville	223,113	349	127	1,760	0.4
Greenwood	204,400	319	115	1,777	0.4
Marlboro	281,271	439	157	1,788	0.4
Oconee	284,348	444	155	1,835	0.3
York	276,650	432	137	2,014	0.3
Kershaw	360,485	563	175	2,061	0.3
Saluda	192,173	300	90	2,126	0.3
McCormick	212,021	331	95	2,230	0.3
Richland	340,121	531	148	2,299	0.3
Barnwell	281,764	440	107	2,637	0.2
Beaufort	147,441	230	45	3,305	0.2
Aiken	500,546	782	141	3,553	0.2
Lexington	280,742	439	47	5,978	0.1
Total	**14,028,896**	**21,920**	**10,419**	**1,346**	**0.5**

* Acreage shown represents the acreage of forested land and acreage of row crops considered to be significant turkey habitat within each county.

Table 3. County rankings based on total turkeys harvested in South Carolina in 2025.

County	Acres*	Square Miles	Total Harvest	Harvest Rates	
				Ac/Turkey	Turkey/Mi.^{2}
Colleton	502,666	785	558	901	0.7
Williamsburg	513,851	803	529	970	0.7
Berkeley	567,530	887	528	1,074	0.6
Orangeburg	504,516	788	522	966	0.7
Florence	397,888	622	431	923	0.7
Horry	533,336	833	419	1,273	0.5
Dorchester	302,717	473	301	1,007	0.6
Bamberg	196,573	307	298	659	1.0
Spartanburg	265,939	416	292	910	0.7
Sumter	338,968	530	290	1,169	0.5
Clarendon	298,087	466	282	1,058	0.6
Fairfield	384,607	601	269	1,431	0.4
Georgetown	399,638	624	264	1,513	0.4
Charleston	288,732	451	263	1,098	0.6
Greenville	294,257	460	256	1,150	0.6
Laurens	317,916	497	249	1,277	0.5
Marion	216,907	339	248	876	0.7
Hampton	324,840	508	244	1,330	0.5
Union	258,111	403	241	1,072	0.6
Chesterfield	372,478	582	235	1,586	0.4
Newberry	317,761	497	204	1,556	0.4
Allendale	216,455	338	196	1,104	0.6
Jasper	309,889	484	195	1,590	0.4
Chester	300,589	470	183	1,641	0.4
Kershaw	360,485	563	175	2,061	0.3
Anderson	219,068	342	174	1,261	0.5
Lee	220,106	344	163	1,349	0.5
Darlington	286,228	447	163	1,754	0.4
Edgefield	246,543	385	160	1,544	0.4
Marlboro	281,271	439	157	1,788	0.4
Oconee	284,348	444	155	1,835	0.3
Lancaster	266,382	416	151	1,759	0.4
Cherokee	156,664	245	150	1,043	0.6
Richland	340,121	531	148	2,299	0.3
Pickens	219,926	344	143	1,535	0.4
Aiken	500,546	782	141	3,553	0.2
Dillon	214,069	334	140	1,532	0.4
Calhoun	190,584	298	139	1,376	0.5
York	276,650	432	137	2,014	0.3
Abbeville	223,113	349	127	1,760	0.4
Greenwood	204,400	319	115	1,777	0.4
Barnwell	281,764	440	107	2,637	0.2
McCormick	212,021	331	95	2,230	0.3
Saluda	192,173	300	90	2,126	0.3
Lexington	280,742	439	47	5,978	0.1
Beaufort	147,441	230	45	3,305	0.2
Total	**14,028,896**	**21,920**	**10,419**	**1,346**	**0.5**

* Acreage shown represents the acreage of forested land and acreage of row crops considered to be significant turkey habitat within each county.

Table 4. Estimated number of turkey hunters, average days hunted, and total hunting effort in SC in 2025.

County	Total Harvest	Number Hunters	Hunters Rank	Avg. Days Hunted	Total Man/Days	Days Rank
Abbeville	127	1,097	14	6.4	4,946	16
Aiken	141	788	26	5.9	3,767	27
Allendale	196	552	37	5.7	2,650	35
Anderson	174	1,340	7	5.9	6,590	7
Bamberg	298	640	33	6.3	3,052	32
Barnwell	107	478	39	6.5	1,838	41
Beaufort	45	265	46	4.0	770	46
Berkeley	528	1,973	1	6.1	10,904	1
Calhoun	139	574	34	4.9	2,345	38
Charleston	263	1,112	13	5.1	5,022	15
Cherokee	150	574	35	7.3	3,073	31
Chester	183	1,178	11	5.6	5,528	12
Chesterfield	235	832	25	5.8	3,746	28
Clarendon	282	692	30	5.4	2,976	33
Colleton	558	1,340	8	5.9	6,146	10
Darlington	163	508	38	6.4	2,539	36
Dillon	140	368	44	5.4	1,491	44
Dorchester	301	1,060	15	6.3	5,362	13
Edgefield	160	979	19	5.8	4,502	22
Fairfield	269	1,848	2	6.8	9,836	2
Florence	431	743	28	6.5	3,656	29
Georgetown	264	670	32	5.3	2,872	34
Greenville	256	1,200	9	4.9	6,395	8
Greenwood	115	986	18	6.1	5,119	14
Hampton	244	847	24	5.6	4,599	20
Horry	419	891	21	6.7	4,460	23
Jasper	195	442	41	5.8	2,220	39
Kershaw	175	1,053	16	5.8	4,842	18
Lancaster	151	692	31	5.8	4,009	25
Laurens	249	1,678	3	6.0	8,504	5
Lee	163	478	40	6.9	2,157	40
Lexington	47	383	43	4.9	1,471	45
McCormick	95	905	20	6.6	4,523	21
Marion	248	420	42	6.2	1,693	42
Marlboro	157	280	45	5.3	1,686	43
Newberry	204	1,634	4	5.6	8,532	4
Oconee	155	751	27	6.8	4,731	19
Orangeburg	522	1,568	6	5.6	7,533	6
Pickens	143	1,001	17	6.2	4,946	17
Richland	148	861	22	4.7	4,051	24
Saluda	90	574	36	7.3	2,442	37
Spartanburg	292	1,200	10	5.8	6,146	9
Sumter	290	729	29	7.1	3,621	30
Union	241	1,605	5	7.0	8,726	3
Williamsburg	529	1,156	12	5.7	5,660	11
York	137	861	23	6.7	3,934	26
Total	**10,419**	**41,805**	**NA**	**5.2***	**205,605**	**NA**

*Note - Since individuals hunt multiple counties the average number of days hunted per county varies from the average number of days individuals hunt (6.9 days).

Table 5. Wildlife Management Area (WMA) turkey harvest reported through SC Game Check in 2025.

Property Name	County	Acreage	Harvest	Ac/Turkey
Aiken Gopher Tortoise HP WMA	Aiken	1,782	2	759
Belfast WMA *	Laurens, Newberry	4,664	8	568
Bobwhite Hills WMA *	Lee, Sumter	774	1	659
Bonneau Ferry WMA #	Berkeley	10,712	13	829
Brasstown Creek HP WMA	Oconee	3,170	4	900
Broad River Waterfowl Area	Fairfield	640	2	273
Caesars Head / Jones Gap WMA	Greenville	3,335	1	2,841
Chestnut Ridge HP WMA	Greenville	2,047	4	581
Cliff Pitts WMA	Laurens	1,098	2	468
Crackerneck WMA~	Aiken	10,600	7	1,505
Donnelley WMA *	Colleton	8,066	7	1,145
Draper WMA *	York	806	4	229
Edisto River WMA*	Dorchester	1,394	2	594
Fants Grove WMA	Anderson, Oconee, Pickens	7,444	19	396
Forty-Acre Rock HP WMA	Lancaster	2,965	2	1,263
Great Pee Dee River HP WMA*	Darlington	2,725	9	290
Hamilton Ridge WMA	Hampton	13,281	13	1,028
James L. Mason WMA	McCormick	1,999	1	1,703
Jocassee Gorges (JTNRA)	Oconee, Pickens	33,000	11	3,123
Keowee WMA	Oconee, Pickens	4,930	4	1,400
Lewis Ocean Bay HP WMA*	Horry	10,097	4	2,867
Liberty Hill WMA	Kershaw, Lancaster	7,876	6	1,342
Little Pee Dee River HP WMA*	Horry, Marion	10,444	22	468
London Creek WMA	Cherokee	1,758	9	187
Long Creek Tracts WMA	Oconee	500	9	53
Longleaf Pine HP WMA*	Lee	843	1	718
Manchester State Forest WMA	Sumter	23,135	23	985
Marsh WMA *	Marion	8,660	8	1,054
McBee WMA *	Chesterfield	1,213	4	344
McCalla WMA	Abbeville	6,004	4	1,705
Mill Shoals WMA	Pickens	774	1	659
Moultrie Hunt Unit WMA*	Berkeley	9,773	7	1,387
Oak Lea WMA	Clarendon	2,000	11	189
Palachucola WMA	Hampton, Jasper	6,757	11	640
Pee Dee Station WMA*	Florence	2,701	7	383
Poe Creek State Forest	Oconee, Pickens	2,498	1	2,128
Sand Hills State Forest	Chesterfield, Darlington	46,838	29	1,596
Santee Coastal Reserve WMA ^	Charleston, Georgetown	4,000	2	1,704
Santee Cooper Tract WMA	Spartanburg	110	1	94
Santee Cooper WMA #	Orangeburg	3,144	5	670
Tillman Sand Ridge HP WMA	Jasper	1,421	2	605
T. Crk/Kirsh/Ross/McConnells Tracts	York	1,192	4	338
Waccamaw River HP *	Horry	6,691	21	317
Wateree River HP WMA	Richland	3,674	6	626
Webb WMA	Hampton	5,866	6	999
Wee Tee State Forest	Georgetown, Williamsburg	12,439	4	3,532
Woodbury WMA *	Marion	25,668	36	705
Worth Mountain WMA *	York	1,643	4	466
Other / Unnamed WMAs	*various*	126,000	85	1,491
USFWS ACE Basin NWR (Youth Lottery)	Charleston, Colleton, Hampton	11,815	1	10,064
USFWS Carolina Sandhills NWR	Chesterfield	47,850	19	2,547
USFWS Savannah NWR	Jasper	7,556	2	3,218
USFWS Waccamaw NWR	Georgetown, Horry, Marion	5,515	1	4,698
USFS Francis Marion NF	Berkeley, Charleston	259,000	181	1,433
USFS Sumter NF, Enoree RD	5 Central Piedmont Counties	170,000	121	1,406
USFS Sumter NF, Long Cane RD	5 Western Piedmont Counties	120,000	73	1,649
USFS Sumter NF, Andrew Pickens RD	Oconee	85,000	39	2,194
TOTAL		**1,155,887**	**885**	**1,306**

** Open for hunting Thurs. - Sat. only*

 # Open for hunting Thurs. - Sat. only , YOUTH ONLY

~ Open for hunting Fri. & Sat. only

^ Open for hunting Saturdays only. Acreage figure is huntable upland acres, not total WMA acreage.

Figure 1. Spring wild turkey harvest in South Carolina 1982-2025. Since 2002 harvest has declined (50%) likely due to less than desirable annual recruitment (see Figure 3 below).

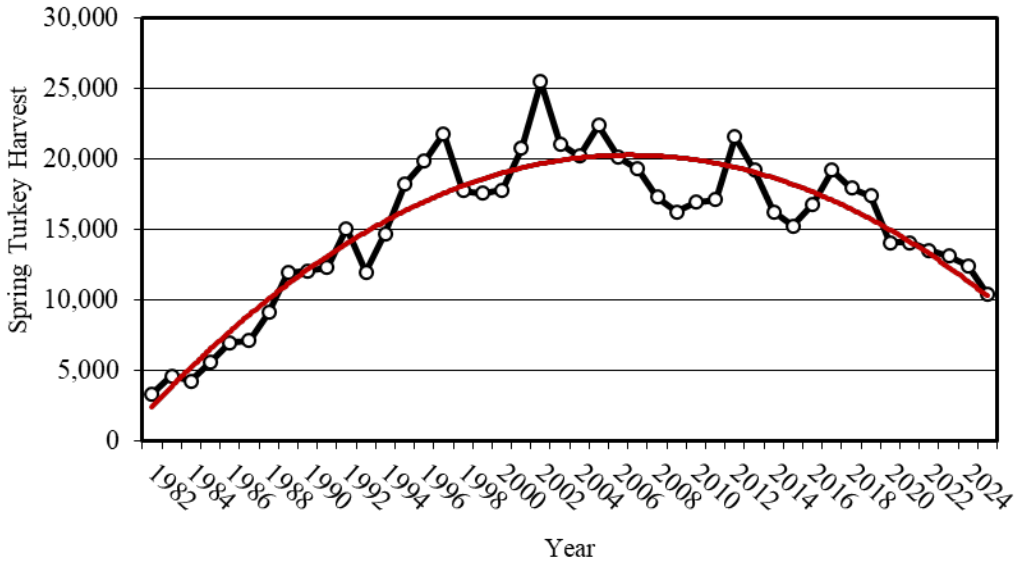


Figure 2. Summer wild turkey recruitment ratio in South Carolina 1982-2025. Note declining trend since 1988. Average recruitment prior to 1988 = 3.5. Average recruitment since 1988 = 2.1. This represents a 40 percent decrease in average recruitment.

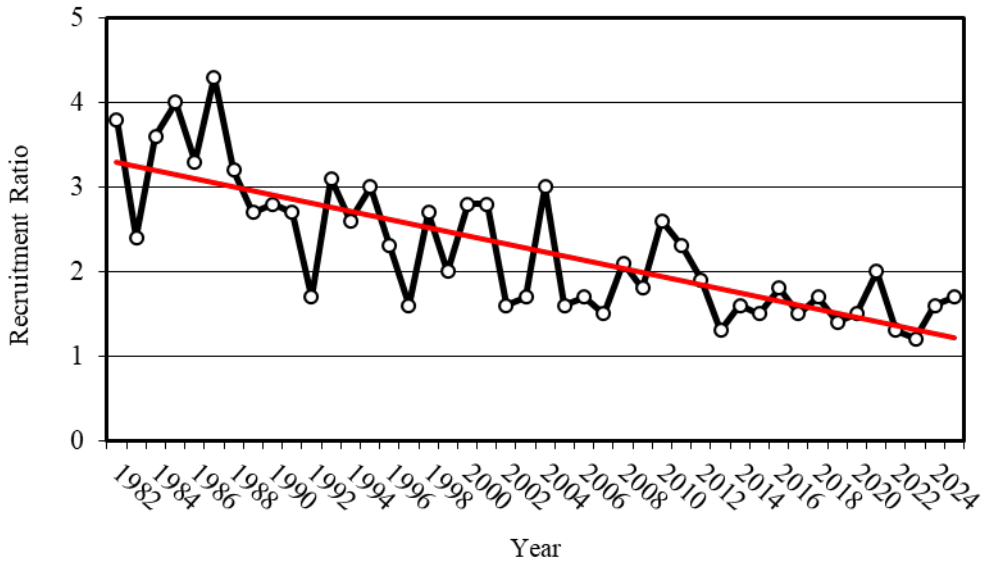
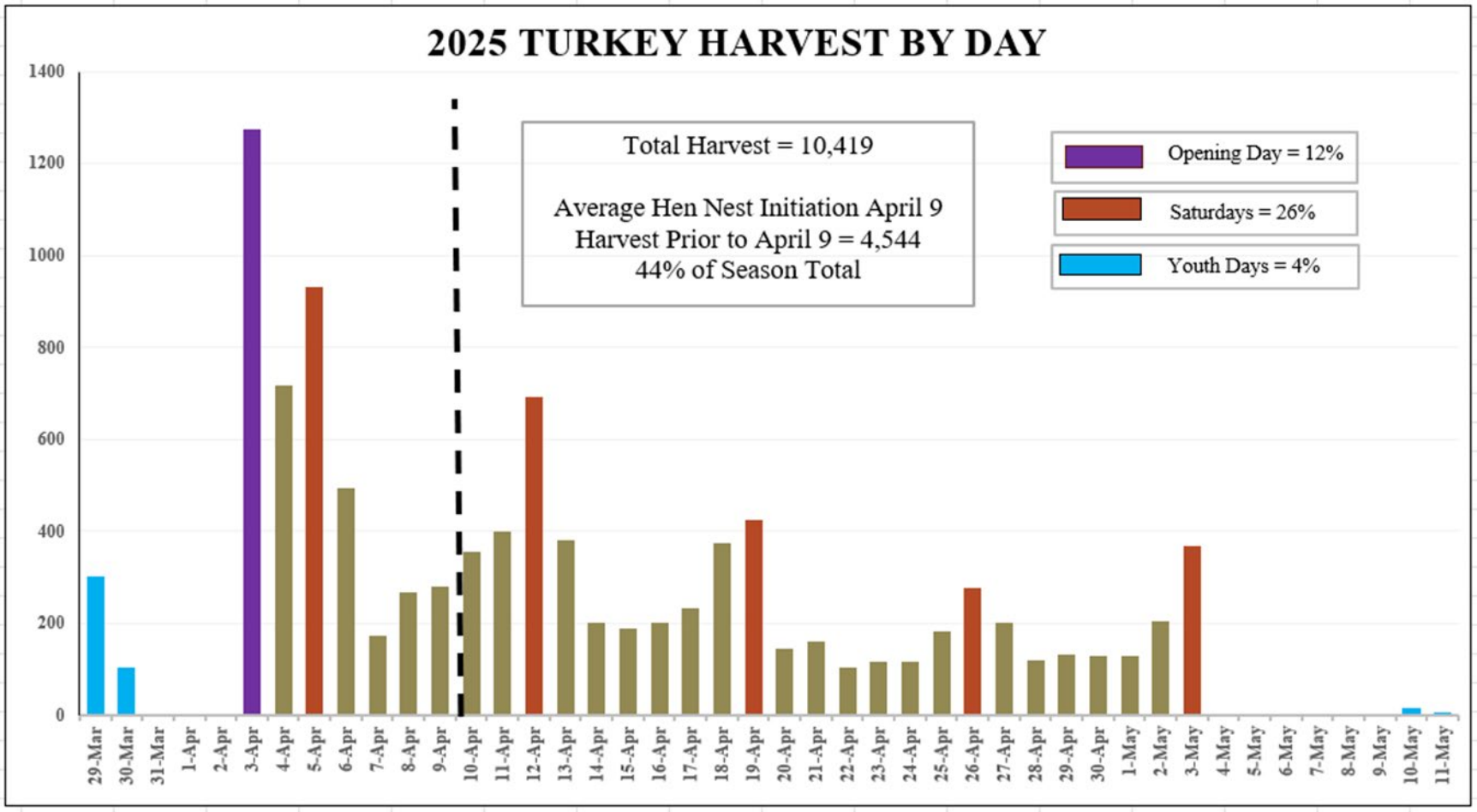


Figure 3. Daily reported turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2025 corrected for reporting noncompliance.



2025 SOUTH CAROLINA WILD TURKEY SUMMER SURVEY

Wild Turkey reproduction ticks up slightly in 2025 - Annually since the early 1980's, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) has conducted a Summer Turkey Survey to estimate reproduction and recruitment of wild turkeys in South Carolina. The survey involves agency wildlife biologists, technicians, and game wardens, as well as many volunteers from other natural resource agencies and the general public. This year over 150 participants recorded 704 unique observations, seeing approximately 2,000 adult turkeys and 1,711 poults across the state in July and August. Although wild turkeys nest primarily in April and May in South Carolina, the survey does not take place until late summer. Therefore, the survey statistics document poults (young turkeys) that survived and entered the fall population (Table 1).

Wild turkey productivity is assessed by observations of reproduction and associated survival of offspring being recruited into the population. This measure of young entering the population based on the number of hens in the population is the Total Recruitment Ratio (TRR). This annual index is the most practical measure of productivity because it considers successful hens, unsuccessful hens, and poult survival. Recruitment of four or more poults per hen is considered excellent, three is good, two is fair and considered a break-even point, and less than two poults per hen is poor. If hens are successful at some level, a turkey population can be maintained. However, the goal is to optimize conditions through management applications to promote optimal reproductive success and turkey populations that provide sustainable, quality turkey hunting opportunities into the future. Unlike deer, wild turkeys are much more susceptible to significant fluctuations in reproduction and recruitment. Lack of reproductive success is often associated with bad weather (cold and wet) during nesting and brood rearing season. However, there are a host of predators that take advantage of turkey nests and broods including: raccoons, opossums, skunks, armadillos, snakes, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, feral hogs, and numerous avian predators including hawks, owls, and crows.

South Carolina has experienced declines in turkey productivity since 1988. Average recruitment prior to 1988 was 3.5 poults per hen. Average recruitment since 1988 has been 2.1, representing a 40 percent decrease in average recruitment. Coincidentally, the turkey harvest has decreased approximately 50 percent since it peaked in 2002. This has been a slow and steady decline with TRR numbers in the 1990's averaging 2.5, but since 2005 numbers below 2.0 have been the norm with an average TRR the last 15 years of 1.7 (Figure 2). Long term average TRR figures consistently below 2.0 are indicative of a shrinking population. This year's statewide TRR was 1.7, a slight increase over the five-year average, but still a number indicating poor overall production. For hens that successfully raise a brood, average brood sizes of 3.5 to 4 poults have remained consistent over time. However, the driving factor in the low productivity is the high percentage of hens that have no poults at all by late summer. Fifty-three (53) percent of hens observed this summer had no poults and that figure has averaged 58 percent the last five years (Table 2). Hens without poults are considered unsuccessful and either did not attempt to nest, abandoned their nest, lost their nest to predation or disturbance, or had no poults survive due to predation, exposure, starvation, disease, or flooding.

It is also worth noting that turkeys have high reproductive potential and are normally able to maintain populations despite predation and weather-related factors. Predators and periodic poor weather conditions existed prior to the year 2000 so this more recent and prolonged poor success may be tied to a high number of hens that did not breed successfully or poor fitness, vigor and survival of poults due to genetics, disease, other environmental factors or large-scale changes in habitat. Continued research, surveys and attention to season timing, bag limits and other potential contributing factors is warranted.

Both short- and long-term fluctuations up and down are not unexpected given the reproductive strategy of turkeys and the multiple factors that influence their success and survival. This inherent instability is the reason that annual monitoring is critical for this species. Anyone interested in participating in the annual Summer Turkey Survey is encouraged to sign-up. The survey period is July 1-August 29 annually and those who participate typically spend a reasonable amount of time outdoors during that period. Cooperators obviously must be able to identify wild turkeys and must be comfortable in telling the difference between hens, poults, and gobblers. If you would like to participate in the survey, contact Jay Cantrell at cantrellj@dnr.sc.gov. You will be added to the cooperator list and receive materials at the end of June annually. Those interested in the survey can also download instructions and survey forms at the following website:
http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/turkey/volunbroodsurvey.html

Figure 1. Map of physiographic regions for 2025 Summer Turkey Survey.

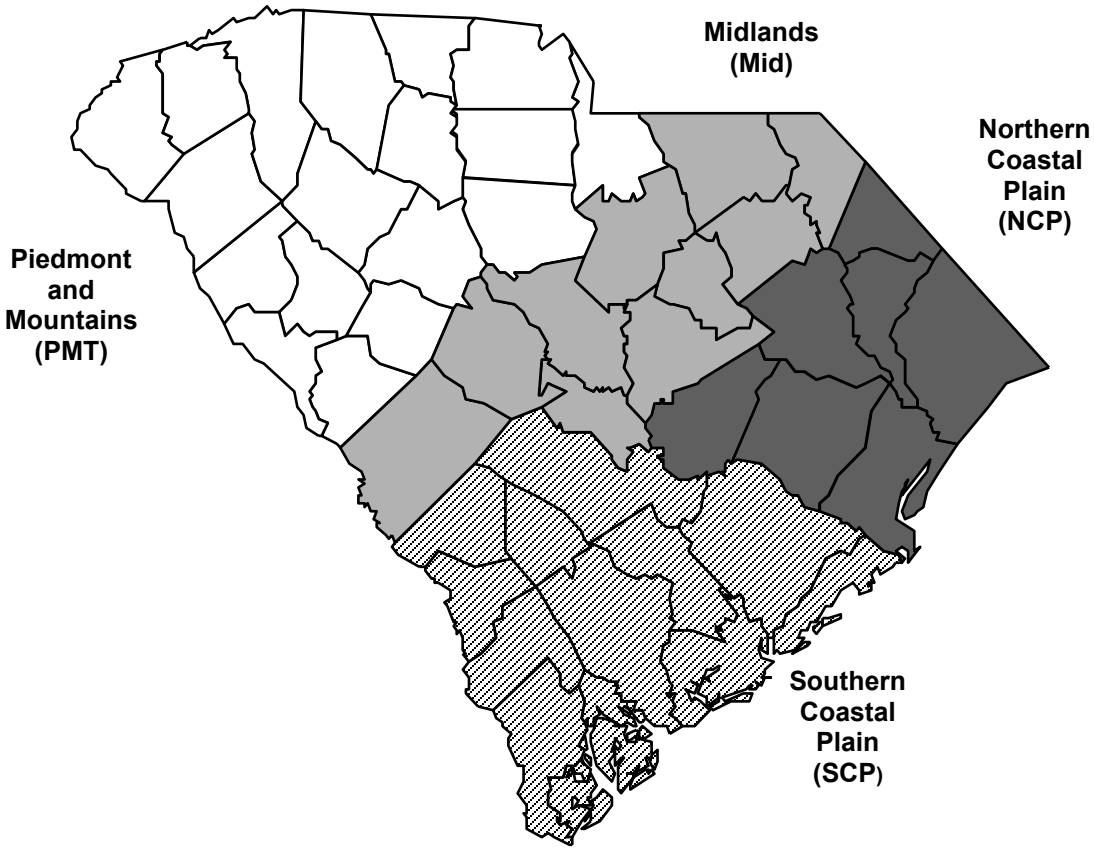


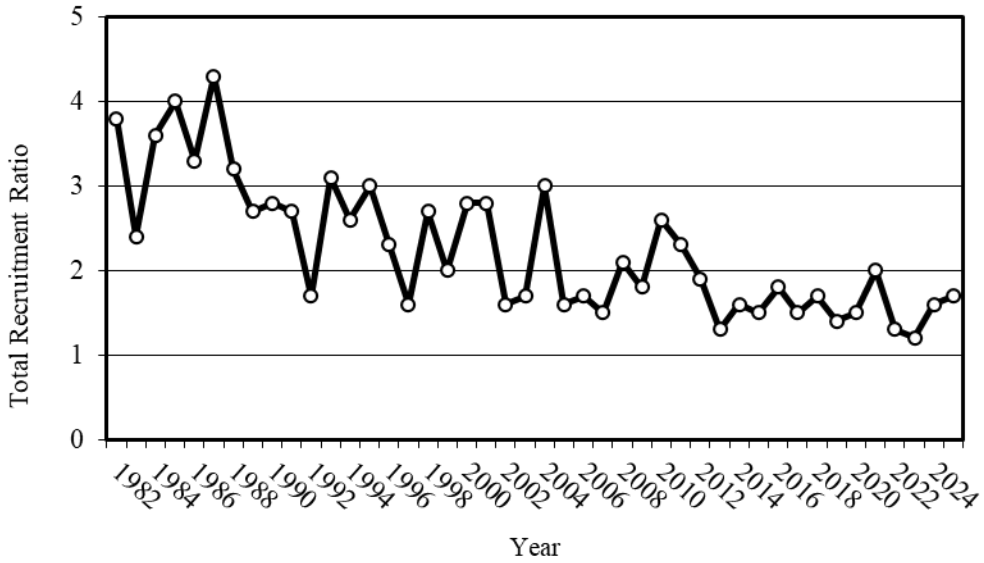
Table 1. Summary of reproductive data for 2025 Summer Turkey Survey by region.

Region	Gobbler/ Hen Ratio	No. Hens w/Poults	No. Hens w/o Poults (%)	No. Poults	Avg. Brood Size	Total Recruitment Ratio
Piedmont & Mtns	0.56	128	193 (61)	422	3.3	1.3
Midlands	1.0	74	67 (47)	322	4.4	2.3
Northern Coastal	0.67	112	127 (53)	433	3.9	1.8
Southern Coastal	0.67	150	138 (46)	534	3.6	1.8
Statewide	**0.70**	**464**	**525 (53)**	**1,711**	**3.7**	**1.7**

Table 2. Statewide Summer Turkey Survey reproductive data 2021-2025.

Year	Gobbler/ Hen Ratio	No. Hens w/Poults	No. Hens w/o Poults (%)	No. Poults	Avg. Brood Size	Total Recruitment Ratio
2021	0.54	976	978 (50)	3,966	4.1	2.0
2022	0.62	656	1162 (64)	2,290	3.5	1.3
2023	0.68	423	804 (66)	1,493	3.5	1.2
2024	0.57	601	763 (56)	2,140	3.6	1.6
2025	0.70	464	525 (53)	1,711	3.7	1.7
Average	**0.62**	**624**	**846 (58)**	**2,320**	**3.7**	**1.6**

Figure 2. Summer wild turkey recruitment ratio in South Carolina 1982-2025.



SUMMARY OF CURRENT WILD TURKEY RESEARCH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

SCDNR is contributing funding and cooperation on a study entitled "Reproductive Ecology of Wild Turkeys in an Unhunted Population." This is a joint project between SCDNR, USDA Forest Service-Southern Research Station, University of Georgia, Louisiana State University, and University of Missouri. This research is occurring on the Savannah River Site (SRS) and is focused on evaluating reproductive ecology of a population of wild turkeys not exposed to hunting. Specific objectives include:

1. Determining space use, habitat selection, and survival of male and female wild turkeys
2. Assessing nesting and brooding ecology of female wild turkeys, with a focus on thoroughly describing nesting chronology and behavior of females during laying, incubating, and brooding.
3. Describing vegetative and habitat characteristics associated with nest sites and areas used by brooding females.
4. Spatially and temporally describing gobbling activity and relating gobbling activity to nesting chronology of females and movement ecology of males.
5. Evaluating the genetic mating system of wild turkeys and describe patterns of parentage in clutches of females.

These research objectives have been studied on several other study sites across the Southeast in recent years on populations subjected to hunting (e.g. the recent SCDNR funded project at the Webb Wildlife Center). By conducting parallel research on an unhunted population, we will be able to better assess the impacts of hunting on wild turkeys.

During 2020 to 2025, we captured 371 wild turkeys (145 males and 226 females). We fitted 119 males and 207 females with GPS transmitters. We monitored 228 (2021 = 32, 2022 = 51, 2023 = 38, 2024 = 31, 2025 = 76) nest attempts, 73 (32%) of which successfully hatched during 2021-2025. The average date of nest initiation (onset of laying) for first nest attempts was April 5. We observed an 86.9% nest initiation rate by females. We visually monitored 25 broods until brood failure or 28 days after hatch, with 35.71% of broods surviving to 28 days post hatch. Rates of nest initiation, success, as well as brood survival, were higher on SRS than on any of the hunted sites we're conducting research on throughout the southeastern US.

We identified the sex ratio of 302 hatched poults (male = 131, female = 161) from 31 hatched nests. The offspring sex ratio was 46.69 and was not statistically different from 50/50. Conversely, on 3 other study sites across the southeastern US where spring harvest of males occurs, we found evidence that sex ratio of offspring was biased towards females, with the predicted probability of producing male offspring on hunted sites being 47% lower than the predicted probability of producing male offspring on SRS (non-hunted site). Annual survival of adult males on SRS was 0.83 and breeding season survival of adult females that initiated nests was 0.76, so survival of adult males exceeded that of adult females. A slightly female biased offspring sex ratio (although statistically at 50/50), and a decreased adult female survival rate compared to males, would ultimately lead to an adult sex ratio at 50/50.

We also extracted DNA and genotyped 241 eggshell membranes from 25 nests. We identified 25 mothers and assigned paternity for 42 offspring to males we captured during trapping. We found 17 (68%) nests were consistent with a single mother and father. We did not detect multiple maternity in any of these nests. We detected paternity involving 2 or more males in 8 (32%) nests and found that 5 males sired offspring in more than 1 nest. We also found that these 5 males were responsible for siring 74 (31%) of all offspring. Lastly, we evaluated sibling relationships within hatched clutches and found that 74.7% of offspring were full siblings, indicating these individuals shared both a mother and father, whereas 25.3% were half siblings, suggesting these individuals shared only a single parent.

This project will continue through 2027, and additional findings will be provided as they become available.

WILD TURKEY PUBLIC LANDS HABITAT ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Legislation passed by the SC General Assembly in 2019 created a fee on turkey tags beginning in 2020. The statute calls for a portion of the turkey tag revenue to be used for the improvement of wild turkey habitat and hunting opportunities on public lands. The *South Carolina Wild Turkey Public Lands Habitat Enhancement Program* is a partnership between SCDNR and the South Carolina Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF SC). SCDNR turkey tag revenue is combined with funds received from the NWTF SC through their Hunting Heritage Super Fund, dollars generated by local chapter banquets, and other fund-raising events across the state. By joining funds and efforts of SCDNR and NWTF SC, this cooperative cost-share program provides resources to State and Federal land managers to accomplish management projects on public lands open to turkey hunting to benefit wild turkeys and other wildlife on public lands in South Carolina.

Annually, a request for proposals (RFP) for the program are made available to public land managers. Project proposals are rated by a committee consisting of SCDNR staff, the NWTF District Biologist, and designees from the NWTF SC Board of Directors. Wild turkey management projects that are considered include habitat/ecosystem restoration, pre-commercial thinning, firebreak installation, prescribed burning, native and exotic vegetation control, creation or expansion of wildlife openings, road daylighting, hunter access improvements, early successional habitat maintenance, planting of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees, or other beneficial management practices. Well designed, multi-year habitat projects generally receive higher evaluation scores; however annual project proposals, requested equipment purchases, or other similar projects are not precluded from consideration.

During FY2025, approximately $100,000 of turkey tag revenue was combined with approximately $106,000 NWTF dollars to fund 21 habitat enhancement projects. These projects directly impacted 1,954 acres of publicly hunted turkey habitat on SCDNR, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, US Department of Energy, and US Army Corps of Engineers properties across the state. Excluding NWTF funds, over $200,000 of turkey tag revenue has been allocated in the FY26 Turkey Program budget for turkey habitat projects in South Carolina.

SUMMARY OF WILD TURKEY TAG REVENUE AND EXPENDATURES FY2025

Revenue FY2025	**$1,358,675**
Expenditures	
Turkey Tag Administration – tag forms, envelopes, printing, postage	$147,101
SC Wild Turkey Public Lands Habitat Enhancement Program	$100,000
Savannah River Site wild turkey reproductive ecology study	$286,834
Total Expenditures	**$533,935**
Carryover	**$824,740**

PREVIOUS WILD TURKEY LEGISLATIVE REPORTS

- Report on public meetings related to wild turkey declines and options for future management
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina with Recommendations on Seasons and Bag Limits (PDF)
    - Appendices - 8MB (PDF)
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2020
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2021
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2022
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2023
- Wild Turkey Resources in South Carolina 2024