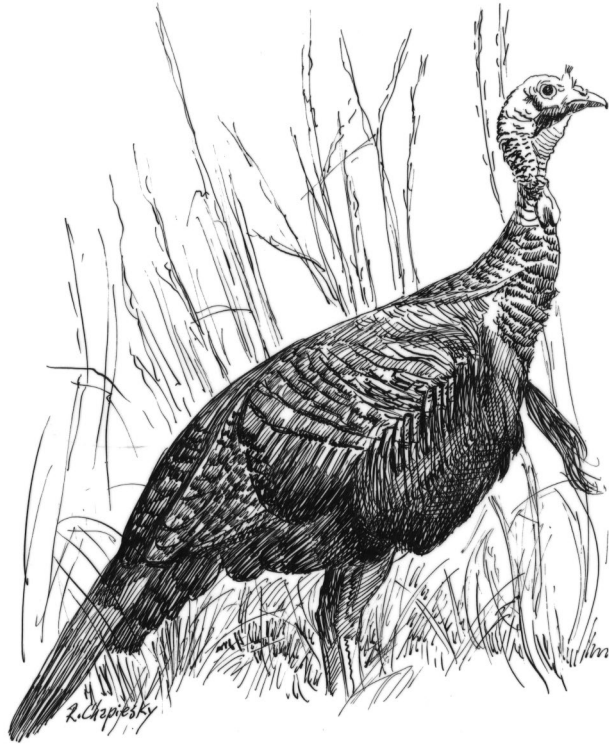


2023 South Carolina TURKEY HARVEST REPORT



SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES TURKEY RESEARCH & MANAGEMENT PROJECT



Submitted by
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Introduction

Ranking only behind white-tailed deer in popularity among hunters, the Eastern wild turkey is an important natural resource in South Carolina. The 2023 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) the statewide spring gobbler harvest in 2023, (2) the harvest of gobblers in the constituent counties of the state, and (3) hunting effort related to turkeys. Information on hunter's 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 harvest 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. The 2021 spring season marked the inaugural year of SC Game Check and electronic harvest reporting for turkeys. With this, SCDNR has two sources of harvest data for comparison. It should be noted that although reporting is mandatory, noncompliance by some hunters should be expected. Rates of noncompliance will be estimated using the post season survey and due to noncompliance, figures obtained from the survey will likely be higher than those from electronic harvest reporting.

Survey Methodology

The 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey represented a random mail survey that involved a single mail-out. The questionnaire for the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey was developed by Wildlife Section personnel (Figure 1). The mailing list database was constructed by randomly selecting 35,000 individuals who received a set of 2023 Turkey Transportation Tags which are required to hunt turkeys in South Carolina. Data entry was completed by Success Staffing, LLC, Seabrook, South Carolina.

Results from the mail survey were corrected for nonresponse bias using data collected by Southwick Associates, Fernandina Beach, Florida using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview program (CATI).

Statistical analysis was conducted using Statistix 10 (Analytical Software, Tallahassee, FL).

Results and Discussion

Turkey Harvest

During the 2023 spring season it is estimated that a total of 11,583 adult gobblers and 1,491 jakes were harvested for a statewide total of 13,074 turkeys (Table 1). This figure represents a 3.1 percent decrease from the estimated harvest in 2022 (13,488). Recent turkey harvest figures remain well below levels from the past reflecting decreased numbers of turkeys likely due to ongoing poor recruitment of poult into the population. This trend appears to be a regional situation and has been called the “southeast turkey decline” by biologists and managers.

The percentage of jakes in the 2023 harvest was approximately 11 percent based on the post season survey and 6 percent based on reports through SC Game Check. Both are relatively low percentage of jakes in the harvest and similar to 2022.

The 2023 spring season was the third year of SC Game Check and electronic harvest reporting for wild turkeys. Therefore, SCDNR now has two sources of harvest data for comparison. There were 10,234 turkeys reported through SC Game Check. Although reporting is mandatory there will always be lack of compliance by some proportion of hunters. To estimate noncompliance a question was included on the hunter survey asking hunters who indicated they killed a turkey(s) “Did you report your harvest to SC Game Check?”. Results indicate that 23 percent of hunters admit to not reporting their harvest. Using this as a correction factor increases the figure that should have been reported through SC Game Check to approximately 12,600 turkeys. Therefore, there is about a 9 percent discrepancy between the corrected reported harvest and the harvest estimated by the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey.

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 mile²). When considering the estimated turkey habitat that is available in South Carolina, the turkey harvest rate in 2023 was 0.6

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 5 counties for harvest per unit area were Greenville (1.2 turkeys/mile²), Spartanburg (1.1 turkeys/mile²), Bamberg (1.0 turkeys/mile²), Laurens (0.9 turkeys/mile²), and Fairfield (0.9 turkeys/mile²) (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 2023 were, Williamsburg, Berkeley, Greenville, Orangeburg, and Fairfield (Table 3).

Number of Turkey Hunters

Even though all individuals receiving a set of Turkey Transportation Tags were eligible to hunt turkeys, only 50 percent indicated that they actually hunted turkeys. Based on this figure, approximately 46,522 hunters participated in the 2023 spring turkey season, a 3 percent decrease from 2022 (47,824). Counties with the highest estimates for individual hunters include Fairfield, Newberry, Laurens, Berkeley, Newberry, and Orangeburg (Table 4).

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 2023 season (Table 4). Successful hunters averaged significantly more days afield (9.3 days) than unsuccessful hunters (5.6 days). Extrapolating to the entire population of turkey hunters yields a figure of 255,140 total days of spring gobbler hunting, an 11 percent decrease from 2022 (287,263 days). The top 5 South Carolina counties for overall days of turkey hunting during 2022 were Fairfield, Laurens, Berkeley, Union, and Newberry (Table 4) with all of these being in the top 5 counties in 2022.

Turkey Harvest by Period of Season

Gobbling by male wild turkeys occurs primarily in the spring and is for the purpose of attracting hens for mating. Therefore, spring turkey hunting is characterized by hunters attempting to locate and call gobbling male turkeys using simulated hen calls. With respect to both biology and quality hunting, the timing of the spring gobbler season should consider three primary factors: peak breeding, peak gobbling, and peak nest initiation. Considering these factors, seasons can be set to afford hunters the best opportunity to hunt during the best time (i.e., peak gobbling) without inhibiting reproductive success of hens.

A recent multi-year nesting study conducted in the lower coastal plain indicates that on average, hens do not initiate nesting until April 9. Gobbling studies conducted simultaneously to the nesting studies indicate peak gobbling occurs the first 10 days of April. The peak in gobbling is believed to coincide with nest initiation by hens because gobbling increases in response to decreased hen availability due to commencement of nesting activities.

The 2023 season marked the fourth year of a return to two spring turkey season frameworks in South Carolina. In Game Zones 1 and 2, which encompass the piedmont and mountains the season is April 1 to May 10, whereas, in Game Zones 3 and 4 located in the coastal plain the season is March 22 to April 30. Based on the research, the April 1 season start date coincides more closely with the onset of nesting and peak gobbling. This should provide for improved reproductive success by hens because gobblers are not harvested too early, and it should also lead to improved hunting success because gobblers are not accompanied by as many hens due to onset of nesting. On the other hand, the March 22 season start date is nearly 3 weeks prior to peak nest initiation and prior to peak gobbling as well. That being the case, considerations should be given to potential effects on reproduction due to excessive early removal of males and decreased hunter success due to decreased gobbling and hunters competing with hens.

If seasons are set appropriately, the greatest proportion of turkeys should be harvested during the first week or 10 days of the season because increasing numbers of hens should be egg-laying or incubating resulting in gobblers that are naïve and more responsive to hunters' calls. Harvest by period of season demonstrates that the timing of the April 1 opening date affords higher turkey harvests as most turkeys are harvested during the 10 days following the April 1 opening date (Figure 4).

When broken-out by specific season frameworks the results are similar. In areas where the season begins March 22, only 38 percent of the total harvest was accounted for during the first 10 days of the season (Figure 5). This is likely because late March is the time of peak breeding and males respond to hunters' calls less because hens are available. Hunters refer to this as gobblers being "henned-up." On the other hand, 44 percent of the harvest occurred during the first 10 days of the season in areas where the season begins April 1 (Figure 6). This is because by April 10 a significant number of hens are involved in nesting activities leaving gobblers "lonely" and more receptive to hunters' calls. These same trends were apparent prior to 2016 when there was split season in South Carolina with one framework beginning March 15 and the other April 1.

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 2023 was 32 percent (Figure 7). 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 3 gobblers. Obviously, most successful hunters harvest only one or two birds. However, it is interesting to note the relative contribution to the total harvest of turkeys by the few hunters who harvest 3 birds. Ironically, the percentage of hunters taking 3 birds was only 2 percent, however, this small percentage of hunters harvested an estimated 21 percent of the total birds taken in the state (Figure 8). Finally, based on reports to SC Game Check, hunters from 34 states outside of South Carolina reported a turkey harvest. However, nonresidents comprised only 9 percent of the overall harvest in 2023.

Hunter Opinion Regarding Turkey Numbers

As has become customary, the 2023 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 (39 percent) believed that the turkey population was decreasing than increasing (15 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 2.2 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 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey asked hunters to indicate the number of turkeys that they “shot but did not kill or recover during the 2023 season in South Carolina.” Approximately 11 percent of hunters indicated that they shot but did not kill or recover at least one turkey in 2023 (10 percent in 2022). There were approximately 46,522 turkey hunters in 2023 meaning that approximately 4,900 turkeys were shot or shot at and not killed or recovered. Therefore, approximately 27 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.

This data is certainly not indicative of “dead and unrecovered turkeys,” however, some percentage of the 4,900 turkeys that were shot at did eventually 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, the 2022 Turkey Hunter Survey asked hunters to identify the number of birds harvested in the morning compared to the afternoon. Results indicate that approximately 78 percent of gobblers were harvested in the morning compared to 22 percent in the afternoon. This coincides with data reported through SC Game Check. This data may be useful if discussions arise concerning the relative importance of morning compared to afternoon harvest of gobblers in the spring. These results have been consistent since this type of data has been available with the long-term average of birds shot in the afternoon about 24 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, the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey asked hunters how many birds they took on the respective types of land. Data from both the survey and reports through SC Game Check indicate that approximately 91 percent of birds are 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, 80 jakes and 788 adult gobblers were harvested for a total of 868 turkeys taken on the various WMAs in 2023. As previously discussed, although reporting is mandatory, 23 percent of hunters admit to not reporting their harvest. With this in mind, an estimate of turkeys harvested on WMAs would increase to approximately 1,067.

Use of Heavier Than Lead Shot

With the decline in turkeys in recent years there is considerable discussion related to the factors contributing to this decline. Although ongoing low recruitment is thought to be the primary factor, many believe that changes in turkey hunting techniques and technology has made hunters more efficient. With the increased sophistication and popularity of heavier than lead shotshells some believe that the use of this shot may be a contributing factor. The belief is that this shot increases the distance of kill shots taken at turkeys which makes harvesting mature gobblers easier and by removing more adult males reproductive success may be affected.

To assess this issue the following question was included on the 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey: “When turkey hunting, do you use shotgun shells with “heavier than lead” pellets (ex. TSS, Tungsten, Bismuth, Hevi-Shot)?”. Responses indicate that approximately 40 percent of hunters use heavier than lead shotshells. Cross-referencing other statistics indicates that hunters who use heavier than lead shot (1) have a higher success rate and (2) harvest more turkeys than hunters who do not use heavier than lead shotshells. However, hunters who use heavier than lead shot also average hunting more which could explain their increased success and may simply be indicative of them being more avid turkey hunters.

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Table 1. Estimated statewide turkey harvest in South Carolina in 2023.

| County | Acres* | Square Miles | Gobbler Harvest | Jake Harvest | Total Harvest | Percent Jakes | Harvest Rates | |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | | | | Ac/Turkey | Turkey/Mi. ² |
| Abbeville | 223,113 | 349 | 142 | 50 | 192 | 26.0 | 1,162 | 0.6 |
| Aiken | 500,546 | 782 | 157 | 12 | 169 | 7.1 | 2,962 | 0.2 |
| Allendale | 216,455 | 338 | 164 | 37 | 201 | 18.4 | 1,077 | 0.6 |
| Anderson | 219,068 | 342 | 228 | 50 | 278 | 18.0 | 788 | 0.8 |
| Bamberg | 196,573 | 307 | 271 | 25 | 296 | 8.4 | 664 | 1.0 |
| Barnwell | 281,764 | 440 | 142 | 12 | 154 | 7.8 | 1,830 | 0.3 |
| Beaufort | 147,441 | 230 | 50 | 12 | 62 | 19.4 | 2,378 | 0.3 |
| Berkeley | 567,530 | 887 | 586 | 37 | 623 | 5.9 | 911 | 0.7 |
| Calhoun | 190,584 | 298 | 214 | 19 | 233 | 8.2 | 818 | 0.8 |
| Charleston | 288,732 | 451 | 343 | 34 | 377 | 9.0 | 766 | 0.8 |
| Cherokee | 156,664 | 245 | 92 | 12 | 104 | 11.5 | 1,506 | 0.4 |
| Chester | 300,589 | 470 | 242 | 37 | 279 | 13.3 | 1,077 | 0.6 |
| Chesterfield | 372,478 | 582 | 142 | 50 | 192 | 26.0 | 1,940 | 0.3 |
| Clarendon | 298,087 | 466 | 250 | 12 | 262 | 4.6 | 1,138 | 0.6 |
| Colleton | 502,666 | 785 | 493 | 12 | 505 | 2.4 | 995 | 0.6 |
| Darlington | 286,228 | 447 | 157 | 25 | 182 | 13.7 | 1,573 | 0.4 |
| Dillon | 214,069 | 334 | 150 | 10 | 160 | 6.3 | 1,338 | 0.5 |
| Dorchester | 302,717 | 473 | 228 | 12 | 240 | 5.0 | 1,261 | 0.5 |
| Edgefield | 246,543 | 385 | 178 | 25 | 203 | 12.3 | 1,214 | 0.5 |
| Fairfield | 384,607 | 601 | 464 | 50 | 514 | 9.7 | 748 | 0.9 |
| Florence | 397,888 | 622 | 364 | 12 | 376 | 3.2 | 1,058 | 0.6 |
| Georgetown | 399,638 | 624 | 385 | 37 | 422 | 8.8 | 947 | 0.7 |
| Greenville | 294,257 | 460 | 407 | 125 | 532 | 23.5 | 553 | 1.2 |
| Greenwood | 204,400 | 319 | 164 | 37 | 201 | 18.4 | 1,017 | 0.6 |
| Hampton | 324,840 | 508 | 321 | 12 | 333 | 3.6 | 975 | 0.7 |
| Horry | 533,336 | 833 | 378 | 37 | 415 | 8.9 | 1,285 | 0.5 |
| Jasper | 309,889 | 484 | 193 | 20 | 213 | 9.4 | 1,455 | 0.4 |
| Kershaw | 360,485 | 563 | 264 | 12 | 276 | 4.3 | 1,306 | 0.5 |
| Lancaster | 266,382 | 416 | 264 | 62 | 326 | 19.0 | 817 | 0.8 |
| Laurens | 317,916 | 497 | 328 | 100 | 428 | 23.4 | 743 | 0.9 |
| Lee | 220,106 | 344 | 142 | 12 | 154 | 7.8 | 1,429 | 0.4 |
| Lexington | 280,742 | 439 | 21 | 12 | 33 | 36.4 | 8,507 | 0.1 |
| McCormick | 212,021 | 331 | 171 | 37 | 208 | 17.8 | 1,019 | 0.6 |
| Marion | 216,907 | 339 | 214 | 12 | 226 | 5.3 | 960 | 0.7 |
| Marlboro | 281,271 | 439 | 178 | 50 | 228 | 21.9 | 1,234 | 0.5 |
| Newberry | 317,761 | 497 | 250 | 25 | 275 | 9.1 | 1,155 | 0.6 |
| Oconee | 284,348 | 444 | 128 | 37 | 165 | 22.4 | 1,723 | 0.4 |
| Orangeburg | 504,516 | 788 | 457 | 75 | 532 | 14.1 | 948 | 0.7 |
| Pickens | 219,926 | 344 | 200 | 37 | 237 | 15.6 | 928 | 0.7 |
| Richland | 340,121 | 531 | 228 | 25 | 253 | 9.9 | 1,344 | 0.5 |
| Saluda | 192,173 | 300 | 114 | 37 | 151 | 24.5 | 1,273 | 0.5 |
| Spartanburg | 265,939 | 416 | 385 | 62 | 447 | 13.9 | 595 | 1.1 |
| Sumter | 338,968 | 530 | 257 | 12 | 269 | 4.5 | 1,260 | 0.5 |
| Union | 258,111 | 403 | 285 | 37 | 322 | 11.5 | 802 | 0.8 |
| Williamsburg | 513,851 | 803 | 650 | 12 | 662 | 1.8 | 776 | 0.8 |
| York | 276,650 | 432 | 142 | 22 | 164 | 13.4 | 1,687 | 0.4 |
| Total | 14,028,896 | 21,920 | 11,583 | 1,491 | 13,074 | 11.4 | 1,073 | 0.6 |

95% Conf. Interval for harvest

(+/-) 1,066 (+/-) 368 (+/-) 1,133

* 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 harvest per unit area in South Carolina in 2023.

| County | Acres* | Square Miles | Gobbler Harvest | Jake Harvest | Total Harvest | Percent Jakes | Harvest Rates | |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | | | | Ac/Turkey | Turkey/Mi. ² |
| Greenville | 294,257 | 460 | 407 | 125 | 532 | 23.5 | 553 | 1.2 |
| Spartanburg | 265,939 | 416 | 385 | 62 | 447 | 13.9 | 595 | 1.1 |
| Bamberg | 196,573 | 307 | 271 | 25 | 296 | 8.4 | 664 | 1.0 |
| Laurens | 317,916 | 497 | 328 | 100 | 428 | 23.4 | 743 | 0.9 |
| Fairfield | 384,607 | 601 | 464 | 50 | 514 | 9.7 | 748 | 0.9 |
| Charleston | 288,732 | 451 | 343 | 34 | 377 | 9.0 | 766 | 0.8 |
| Williamsburg | 513,851 | 803 | 650 | 12 | 662 | 1.8 | 776 | 0.8 |
| Anderson | 219,068 | 342 | 228 | 50 | 278 | 18.0 | 788 | 0.8 |
| Union | 258,111 | 403 | 285 | 37 | 322 | 11.5 | 802 | 0.8 |
| Lancaster | 266,382 | 416 | 264 | 62 | 326 | 19.0 | 817 | 0.8 |
| Calhoun | 190,584 | 298 | 214 | 19 | 233 | 8.2 | 818 | 0.8 |
| Berkeley | 567,530 | 887 | 586 | 37 | 623 | 5.9 | 911 | 0.7 |
| Pickens | 219,926 | 344 | 200 | 37 | 237 | 15.6 | 928 | 0.7 |
| Georgetown | 399,638 | 624 | 385 | 37 | 422 | 8.8 | 947 | 0.7 |
| Orangeburg | 504,516 | 788 | 457 | 75 | 532 | 14.1 | 948 | 0.7 |
| Marion | 216,907 | 339 | 214 | 12 | 226 | 5.3 | 960 | 0.7 |
| Hampton | 324,840 | 508 | 321 | 12 | 333 | 3.6 | 975 | 0.7 |
| Colleton | 502,666 | 785 | 493 | 12 | 505 | 2.4 | 995 | 0.6 |
| Greenwood | 204,400 | 319 | 164 | 37 | 201 | 18.4 | 1,017 | 0.6 |
| McCormick | 212,021 | 331 | 171 | 37 | 208 | 17.8 | 1,019 | 0.6 |
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| Kershaw | 360,485 | 563 | 264 | 12 | 276 | 4.3 | 1,306 | 0.5 |
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| Aiken | 500,546 | 782 | 157 | 12 | 169 | 7.1 | 2,962 | 0.2 |
| Lexington | 280,742 | 439 | 21 | 12 | 33 | 36.4 | 8,507 | 0.1 |
| Total | 14,028,896 | 21,920 | 11,583 | 1,491 | 13,074 | 11.4 | 1,073 | 0.6 |

95% Conf. Interval for harvest

(+-) 1,112 (+-) 330 (+-) 1,172

* 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 2023.

| County | Acres* | Square Miles | Gobbler Harvest | Jake Harvest | Total Harvest | Percent Jakes | Harvest Rates | |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | | | | | | Ac/Turkey | Turkey/Mi. ² |
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| Greenville | 294,257 | 460 | 407 | 125 | 532 | 23.5 | 553 | 1.2 |
| Orangeburg | 504,516 | 788 | 457 | 75 | 532 | 14.1 | 948 | 0.7 |
| Fairfield | 384,607 | 601 | 464 | 50 | 514 | 9.7 | 748 | 0.9 |
| Colleton | 502,666 | 785 | 493 | 12 | 505 | 2.4 | 995 | 0.6 |
| Spartanburg | 265,939 | 416 | 385 | 62 | 447 | 13.9 | 595 | 1.1 |
| Laurens | 317,916 | 497 | 328 | 100 | 428 | 23.4 | 743 | 0.9 |
| Georgetown | 399,638 | 624 | 385 | 37 | 422 | 8.8 | 947 | 0.7 |
| Horry | 533,336 | 833 | 378 | 37 | 415 | 8.9 | 1,285 | 0.5 |
| Charleston | 288,732 | 451 | 343 | 34 | 377 | 9.0 | 766 | 0.8 |
| Florence | 397,888 | 622 | 364 | 12 | 376 | 3.2 | 1,058 | 0.6 |
| Hampton | 324,840 | 508 | 321 | 12 | 333 | 3.6 | 975 | 0.7 |
| Lancaster | 266,382 | 416 | 264 | 62 | 326 | 19.0 | 817 | 0.8 |
| Union | 258,111 | 403 | 285 | 37 | 322 | 11.5 | 802 | 0.8 |
| Bamberg | 196,573 | 307 | 271 | 25 | 296 | 8.4 | 664 | 1.0 |
| Chester | 300,589 | 470 | 242 | 37 | 279 | 13.3 | 1,077 | 0.6 |
| Anderson | 219,068 | 342 | 228 | 50 | 278 | 18.0 | 788 | 0.8 |
| Kershaw | 360,485 | 563 | 264 | 12 | 276 | 4.3 | 1,306 | 0.5 |
| Newberry | 317,761 | 497 | 250 | 25 | 275 | 9.1 | 1,155 | 0.6 |
| Sumter | 338,968 | 530 | 257 | 12 | 269 | 4.5 | 1,260 | 0.5 |
| Clarendon | 298,087 | 466 | 250 | 12 | 262 | 4.6 | 1,138 | 0.6 |
| Richland | 340,121 | 531 | 228 | 25 | 253 | 9.9 | 1,344 | 0.5 |
| Dorchester | 302,717 | 473 | 228 | 12 | 240 | 5.0 | 1,261 | 0.5 |
| Pickens | 219,926 | 344 | 200 | 37 | 237 | 15.6 | 928 | 0.7 |
| Calhoun | 190,584 | 298 | 214 | 19 | 233 | 8.2 | 818 | 0.8 |
| Marlboro | 281,271 | 439 | 178 | 50 | 228 | 21.9 | 1,234 | 0.5 |
| Marion | 216,907 | 339 | 214 | 12 | 226 | 5.3 | 960 | 0.7 |
| Jasper | 309,889 | 484 | 193 | 20 | 213 | 9.4 | 1,455 | 0.4 |
| McCormick | 212,021 | 331 | 171 | 37 | 208 | 17.8 | 1,019 | 0.6 |
| Edgefield | 246,543 | 385 | 178 | 25 | 203 | 12.3 | 1,214 | 0.5 |
| Greenwood | 204,400 | 319 | 164 | 37 | 201 | 18.4 | 1,017 | 0.6 |
| Allendale | 216,455 | 338 | 164 | 37 | 201 | 18.4 | 1,077 | 0.6 |
| Abbeville | 223,113 | 349 | 142 | 50 | 192 | 26.0 | 1,162 | 0.6 |
| Chesterfield | 372,478 | 582 | 142 | 50 | 192 | 26.0 | 1,940 | 0.3 |
| Darlington | 286,228 | 447 | 157 | 25 | 182 | 13.7 | 1,573 | 0.4 |
| Aiken | 500,546 | 782 | 157 | 12 | 169 | 7.1 | 2,962 | 0.2 |
| Oconee | 284,348 | 444 | 128 | 37 | 165 | 22.4 | 1,723 | 0.4 |
| York | 276,650 | 432 | 142 | 22 | 164 | 13.4 | 1,687 | 0.4 |
| Dillon | 214,069 | 334 | 150 | 10 | 160 | 6.3 | 1,338 | 0.5 |
| Lee | 220,106 | 344 | 142 | 12 | 154 | 7.8 | 1,429 | 0.4 |
| Barnwell | 281,764 | 440 | 142 | 12 | 154 | 7.8 | 1,830 | 0.3 |
| Saluda | 192,173 | 300 | 114 | 37 | 151 | 24.5 | 1,273 | 0.5 |
| Cherokee | 156,664 | 245 | 92 | 12 | 104 | 11.5 | 1,506 | 0.4 |
| Beaufort | 147,441 | 230 | 50 | 12 | 62 | 19.4 | 2,378 | 0.3 |
| Lexington | 280,742 | 439 | 21 | 12 | 33 | 36.4 | 8,507 | 0.1 |
| Total | 14,028,896 | 21,920 | 11,583 | 1,491 | 13,074 | 11.4 | 1,073 | 0.6 |

95% Conf. Interval for harvest

(+/-) 1,112 (+/-) 330 (+/-) 1,172

* 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 South Carolina in 2023.

| County | Total Harvest | Number Hunters | Avg. Days Hunted | Total Man/Days |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Abbeville | 192 | 1,299 | 6.4 | 7,626 |
| Aiken | 169 | 1,081 | 5.9 | 5,830 |
| Allendale | 201 | 636 | 5.7 | 3,305 |
| Anderson | 278 | 1,190 | 5.9 | 6,399 |
| Bamberg | 296 | 881 | 6.3 | 5,104 |
| Barnwell | 154 | 609 | 6.5 | 3,603 |
| Beaufort | 62 | 236 | 4.0 | 869 |
| Berkeley | 623 | 1,781 | 6.1 | 9,946 |
| Calhoun | 233 | 654 | 4.9 | 2,905 |
| Charleston | 377 | 1,145 | 5.1 | 5,382 |
| Cherokee | 104 | 609 | 7.3 | 4,075 |
| Chester | 279 | 1,444 | 5.6 | 7,389 |
| Chesterfield | 192 | 745 | 5.8 | 3,952 |
| Clarendon | 262 | 772 | 5.4 | 3,839 |
| Colleton | 505 | 1,335 | 5.9 | 7,224 |
| Darlington | 182 | 590 | 6.4 | 3,448 |
| Dillon | 160 | 336 | 5.4 | 1,660 |
| Dorchester | 240 | 700 | 6.3 | 4,057 |
| Edgefield | 203 | 990 | 5.8 | 5,260 |
| Fairfield | 514 | 1,935 | 6.8 | 11,991 |
| Florence | 376 | 1,017 | 6.5 | 6,007 |
| Georgetown | 422 | 999 | 5.3 | 4,884 |
| Greenville | 532 | 1,444 | 4.9 | 6,441 |
| Greenwood | 201 | 836 | 6.1 | 4,642 |
| Hampton | 333 | 1,154 | 5.6 | 5,854 |
| Horry | 415 | 1,208 | 6.7 | 7,447 |
| Jasper | 213 | 690 | 5.8 | 3,682 |
| Kershaw | 276 | 1,245 | 5.8 | 6,562 |
| Lancaster | 326 | 881 | 5.8 | 4,635 |
| Laurens | 428 | 1,899 | 6.0 | 10,432 |
| Lee | 154 | 618 | 6.9 | 3,895 |
| Lexington | 33 | 427 | 4.9 | 1,908 |
| McCormick | 208 | 890 | 6.6 | 5,393 |
| Marion | 226 | 718 | 6.2 | 4,063 |
| Marlboro | 228 | 400 | 5.3 | 1,947 |
| Newberry | 275 | 1,717 | 5.6 | 8,808 |
| Oconee | 165 | 890 | 6.8 | 5,540 |
| Orangeburg | 532 | 1,617 | 5.6 | 8,237 |
| Pickens | 237 | 990 | 6.2 | 5,611 |
| Richland | 253 | 990 | 4.7 | 4,294 |
| Saluda | 151 | 890 | 7.3 | 5,932 |
| Spartanburg | 447 | 1,526 | 5.8 | 8,061 |
| Sumter | 269 | 863 | 7.1 | 5,582 |
| Union | 322 | 1,517 | 7.0 | 9,654 |
| Williamsburg | 662 | 1,390 | 5.7 | 7,248 |
| York | 164 | 736 | 6.7 | 4,515 |
| Total | 13,074 | 46,522 | 5.1* | 255,140 |

*Note - Since individuals hunt multiple counties the average number of days hunted per county varies from the average number of days individuals hunt (6.8 days).

Figure 1. South Carolina Department of Natural Resources 2023 Turkey Hunter Survey.

2023 South Carolina Turkey Hunter Survey

1. Did you turkey hunt in SC this past season (2023)? 1. Yes 2. No
If you answered **No** to this question please **go to question # 11.**
2. Did you harvest any turkeys in SC this past season? 1. Yes 2. No
3. Even if you did not harvest a turkey, please record the SC counties you turkey hunted and the number of days hunted in each county this past season (2023). If you harvested turkeys please record the number of adult gobblers and jakes taken in each county. A day of hunting is defined as any portion of the day spent afield. Please do not give ranges (i.e. 5-10), rather provide absolute numbers (i.e. 5). **Provide information only for yourself** - not friends, relatives, or other people you may have called or guided for or hunted with. *(Jakes typically have beards less than 6", spurs less than 1/2" and longer feathers in the center of their tail fan.)*



**HELP MANAGE
TURKEYS IN S.C.
COMPLETE YOUR
HUNTER SURVEY**

| SC Counties You Turkey Hunted | # Days Hunted | Number Turkeys Harvested |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | | Adult gobblers _____ Jakes _____ |
| 2 | | Adult gobblers _____ Jakes _____ |
| 3 | | Adult gobblers _____ Jakes _____ |
| 4 | | Adult gobblers _____ Jakes _____ |

If you did not harvest any turkeys in SC this past season please go to question 8.

4. If you harvested turkeys in SC this past season, please indicate as best you can the number of turkeys killed by County and 10-day period of the season.

| County of Harvest | Number of Turkeys Harvested by Time Period | | | | |
|-------------------|--|------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| | March 22-31 | April 1-10 | April 11-20 | April 21-30 | May 1-10 |
| 1. | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |

5. How many turkeys did you kill in the morning _____ after 12:00 noon _____?
6. How many turkeys did you kill on **Private Land** _____ and **Public (WMA) Land** _____?
7. Did you report your harvest to SC Game Check? 1. Yes 2. No
8. How many turkeys did you shoot but not kill or recover in SC this past season? _____
9. Compared to past years, how would you describe the number of turkeys in the area that you hunted most often this spring?
Circle one 1. Increasing 2. About the same 3. Decreasing
10. When turkey hunting, do you use shotgun shells with "heavier than lead" pellets (ex. TSS, Tungsten, Bismuth, Hevi-Shot)? 1. Yes 2. No
11. Are you a resident of SC? 1. Yes 2. No
12. If yes, which county _____

Separate and return this portion of the survey. Postage is prepaid. Please do not staple this form.



TURKEY HUNTER SURVEY
SCDNR
PO BOX 167
COLUMBIA SC 29202-0167
www.dnr.sc.gov

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Figure 1. Continued.

May, 2023

Dear SC Turkey Hunter:

Eastern wild turkeys are one of the most important game species in South Carolina. Therefore, it is important that this species be monitored for population status and harvesting activities. Wildlife resource managers require current and accurate information about wild turkey harvests to aid in successfully managing this important natural resource and to optimize future hunting potential. To obtain this needed data, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) is conducting a survey of hunters who received a set of turkey tags during spring 2023.

Although electronic reporting of harvested turkeys is now required, SCDNR will continue to survey hunters to maintain consistency, determine hunter effort, and measure other aspects of turkey hunting. You are one of a group of randomly selected hunters asked to participate in this survey. To draw accurate conclusions it is very important that you complete the survey and return it. Please take time to read each question. **Even if you did not hunt or harvest wild turkeys this spring please indicate this by answering the appropriate questions and moving on to the next set of questions.**

Please note that complete confidentiality will be given to you. Keep in mind that the purpose of the survey is to determine the wild turkey harvest in South Carolina and not to determine whether game laws are observed. By accurately answering the survey questions you will enable SCDNR biologists to better manage the Eastern wild turkey resource for you and other citizens of the state. Therefore, it is very important that you take a few minutes to complete this survey and mail it. Return postage is prepaid.

Results of this survey will be posted on the SCDNR web site once completed. The results from the 2022 survey can be found at: www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/turkey/2022TurkeyHarvest.html

Charles Ruth
Certified Wildlife Biologist
Big Game Program Coordinator

PLEASE MAIL YOUR SURVEY AFTER SEPARATING THIS HALF FROM THE SIDE ON WHICH YOUR ANSWERS HAVE BEEN ENTERED. NO POSTAGE IS NECESSARY.

If you have questions regarding this survey, please call 803-734-3886

The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, disability, religion or age. Direct all inquiries to the Office of Human Resources, P.O. Box 167, Columbia, SC 29202

23-13714



**TURKEY HUNTER SURVEY
SC DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
PO BOX 167
COLUMBIA SC 29202-9976**

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UNITED STATES**

Figure 2. Spring wild turkey harvest in South Carolina 1982-2023. Since 2002 harvest has declined (45%) likely due to less than desirable annual recruitment (see Figure 3 below).

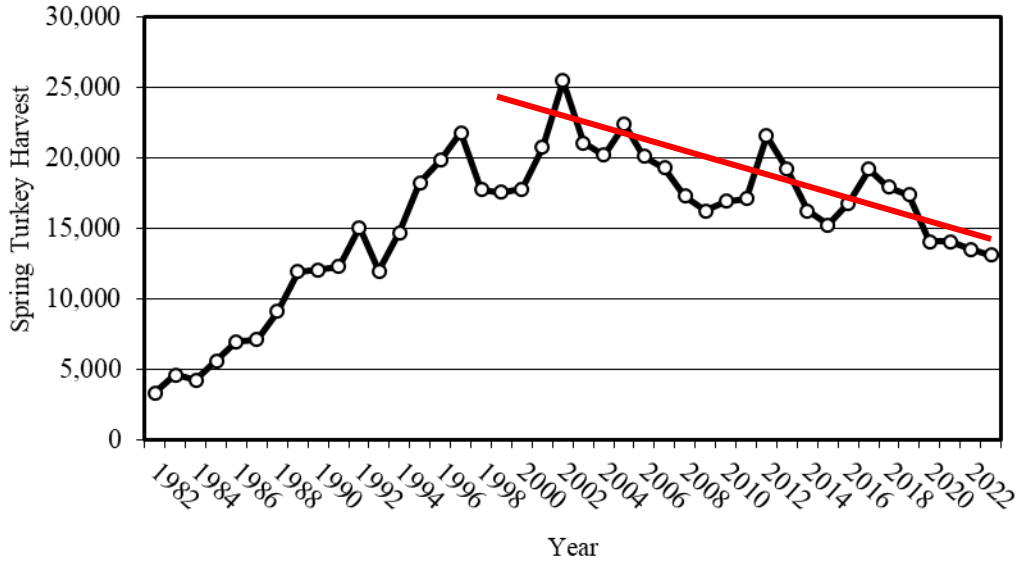


Figure 3. Summer wild turkey recruitment ratio in South Carolina 1982-2022. Note declining trend since 1988. Average recruitment prior to 1988 = 3.5. Average recruitment since 1988 = 2.1. This represents a 40 percent decrease in average recruitment.

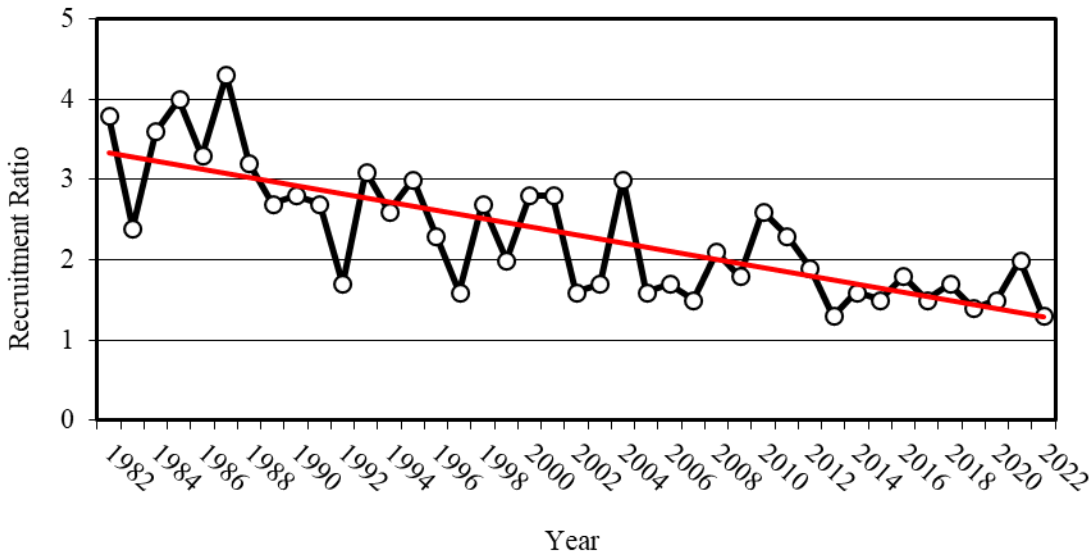


Figure 4. Percentage of gobblers harvested by period of season in South Carolina in 2023.

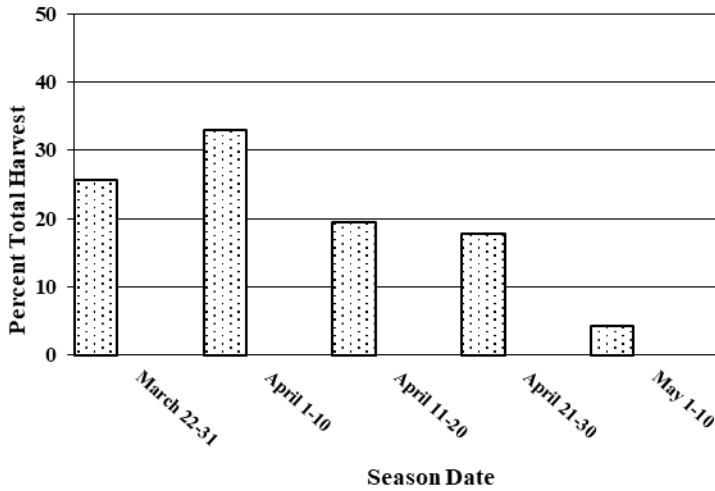


Figure 5. Percentage of gobblers harvested by period of season with March 22-April 30 framework in Game Zones 3 & 4 (coastal plain) in South Carolina in 2023.

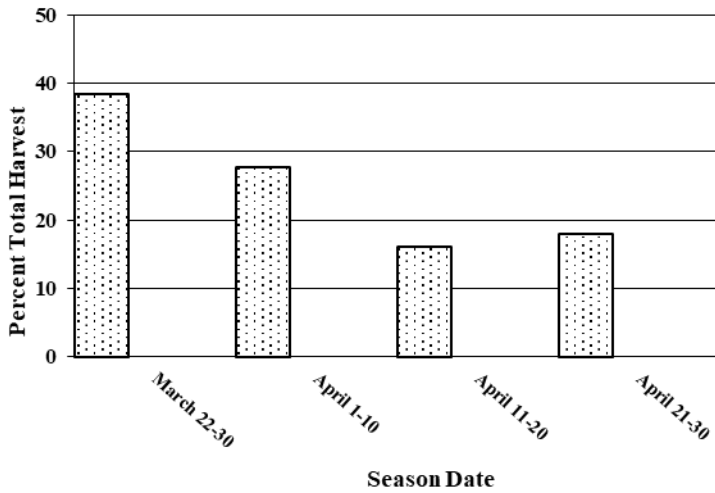


Figure 6. Percentage of gobblers harvested by period of season with April 1-May 10 framework in Game Zones 1 & 2 (piedmont and mountains) in South Carolina in 2023.

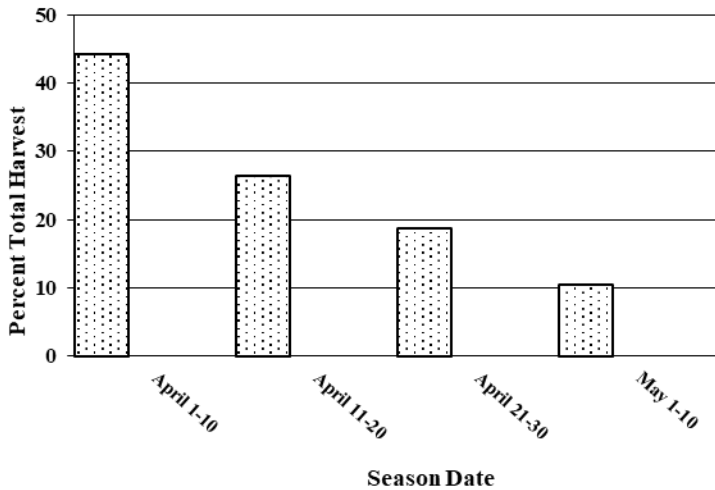


Figure 7. Hunter success during the spring turkey season in South Carolina in 2023. Overall success was 32 percent at harvesting at least one gobbler.

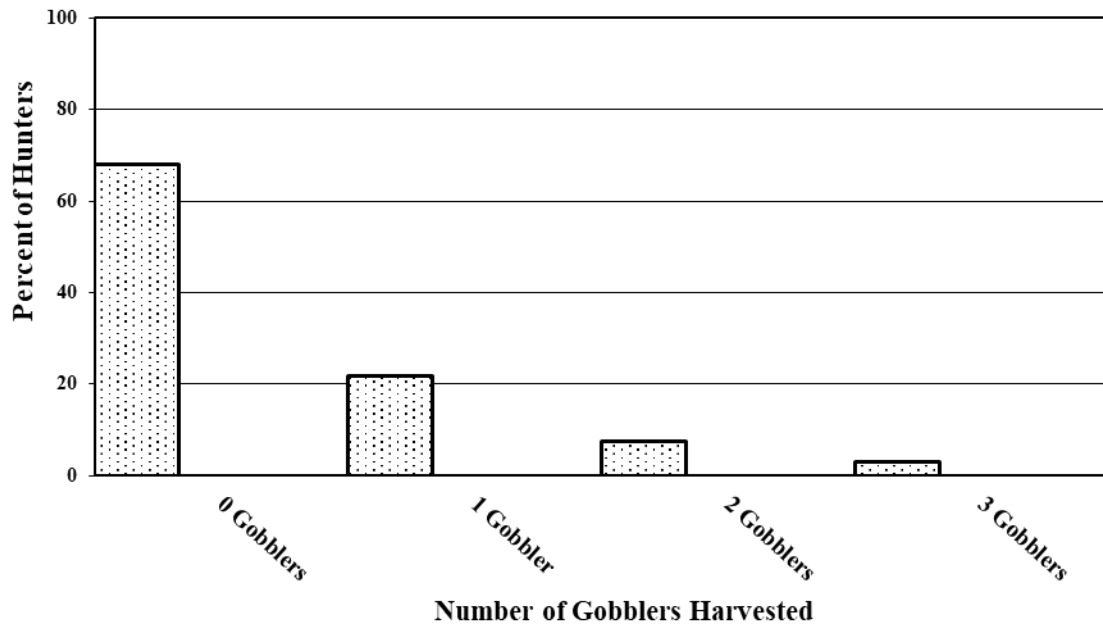


Figure 8. Relative contribution to the total turkey harvest by hunters taking between 1 and 3 gobblers in South Carolina in 2023.

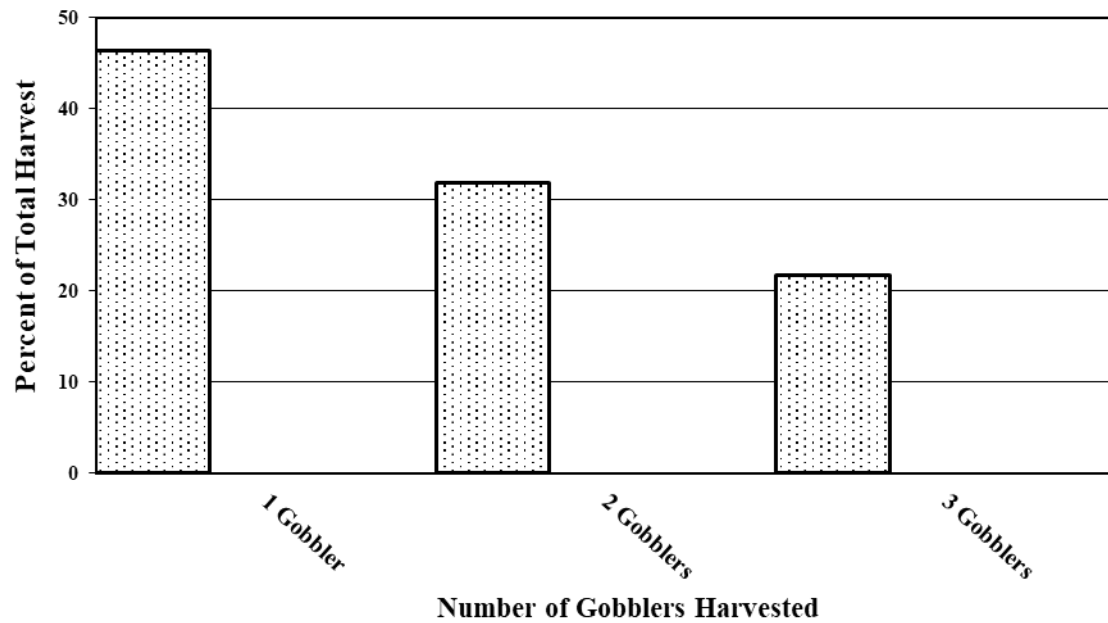


Table 5. Wildlife Management Area (WMA) turkey harvest reported through SC Game Check in 2023

| WMA | County | Acreage | Juvenile | Adult | Total | Ac/Turkey |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Aiken Gopher Tortoise HP WMA | Aiken | 1,782 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1782 |
| Ashmore / Chandler HP WMA | Greenville | 1,126 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1126 |
| Brasstown Creek HP WMA | Oconee | 3,170 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3170 |
| Broad River Waterfowl Area | Fairfield | 640 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 640 |
| Cliff Pitts WMA | Laurens | 1,098 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1098 |
| Crackerneck WMA~ | Aiken | 10,600 | 1 | 9 | 10 | 1060 |
| Draper WMA* | York | 806 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 403 |
| Edisto River WMA* | Dorchester | 1,394 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 279 |
| Fants Grove WMA | Anderson, Oconee, Pickens | 7,444 | 3 | 14 | 17 | 438 |
| Forty-Acre Rock HP WMA | Lancaster | 2,965 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2965 |
| Great Pee Dee River HP WMA | Darlington | 2,725 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 681 |
| Hamilton Ridge WMA | Hampton | 13,281 | 0 | 11 | 11 | 1207 |
| Hickory Top WMA | Clarendon | 1,105 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1105 |
| James L. Mason WMA | McCormick | 1,999 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1999 |
| Jocassee Gorges (JTNRA) | Oconee, Pickens | 33,000 | 1 | 16 | 17 | 1941 |
| Keowee WMA | Oconee, Pickens | 4,930 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 822 |
| Landsford Canal FLA WMA | Chester | 1,049 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 525 |
| Lewis Ocean Bay HP WMA* | Horry | 10,097 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5049 |
| Liberty Hill WMA | Kershaw, Lancaster | 7,876 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 1313 |
| Little Pee Dee River HP WMA* | Horry, Marion | 10,444 | 1 | 6 | 7 | 1492 |
| Long Creek Tract WMA | Oconee | 20 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| Manchester State Forest WMA | Sumter | 23,135 | 4 | 15 | 19 | 1218 |
| Marsh WMA* | Marion | 8,660 | 0 | 13 | 13 | 666 |
| McBee WMA* | Chesterfield | 1,221 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1221 |
| McCalla WMA | Abbeville | 5,667 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1889 |
| Moultrie Hunt Unit WMA* | Berkeley | 9,773 | 1 | 8 | 9 | 1086 |
| Oak Lea WMA | Clarendon | 2,000 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 250 |
| Palachucola WMA | Hampton, Jasper | 6,757 | 0 | 11 | 11 | 614 |
| Pee Dee Station WMA* | Florence | 2,701 | 1 | 14 | 15 | 180 |
| Sand Hills State Forest WMA | Chesterfield, Darlington | 46,838 | 1 | 24 | 25 | 1874 |
| Santee Coastal Reserve WMA^ | Charleston, Georgetown | 4,000 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2000 |
| Santee Cooper Tract WMA | Spartanburg | 90 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 45 |
| Santee Dam WMA | Clarendon | 575 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 288 |
| Steven's Creek HP WMA | Edgefield, McCormick | 434 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 145 |
| Tall Pines WMA | Greenville | 1,757 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 879 |
| Kirsh/Ross/McConnells Tracts | York | 1,192 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1192 |
| Waccamaw River HP* | Horry | 6,691 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 1115 |
| Webb WMA | Hampton | 5,866 | 0 | 10 | 10 | 587 |
| Wee Tee State Forest WMA | Georgetown, Williamsburg | 12,439 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 6220 |
| Woodbury WMA* | Marion | 25,668 | 0 | 34 | 34 | 755 |
| Worth Mountain WMA* | York | 1,643 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 329 |
| Other / Unnamed WMA | <i>various</i> | 126,000 | 15 | 98 | 113 | 1115 |
| Belfast WMA (Lottery) | Laurens, Newberry | 4,664 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4664 |
| Bonneau Ferry WMA (Lottery) | Berkeley | 10,712 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 1785 |
| Donnelley WMA (Lottery) | Colleton | 8,066 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 1613 |
| Wateree River HP WMA (Lottery) | Richland | 3,674 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 735 |
| USFS Francis Marion NF | Berkeley, Charleston | 259,000 | 16 | 178 | 194 | 1335 |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------|------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|
| USFS Sumter NF | Numerous | 375,000 | 24 | 250 | 274 | 1369 |
| TOTAL | | 1,060,808 | 80 | 788 | 868 | 1222 |

* Open for hunting Thurs. - Sat. only

~ Open for hunting Fri. & Sat. only

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