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MDC Says Fall Turkey Hunting Could Be Challenging

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With fall firearms turkey season running Oct. 1-31, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) advises hunters it could be a challenging season.

This year's annual wild-turkey brood-survey shows statewide turkey production in 2016 was lower than the five-year average – likely due to poor nesting success.

“Although we didn’t have many days with heavy rainfall in much of the state this spring, we did have quite a few days with at least some precipitation,” said MDC Turkey Biologist Jason Isabelle. “When hens are repeatedly getting wet while incubating, it can increase the chances of a predator locating the hen and her nest. Looking at this year’s brood survey results, only 29% of hens were observed with poults, which indicates poor nest success.”

Isabelle added June was fairly dry and ideal for brood-rearing in much of the state, but there were relatively few poults that were able to benefit from those conditions due to low nest success this year.

“Despite a poor hatch this year, there are still more turkeys on the landscape in many areas of the state compared to five years ago,” Isabelle said.

Each summer, citizen volunteers and MDC staff record the number of wild turkey hens and recently hatched turkeys, called poults, they see. These observations are then

tallied for the annual brood survey. The number of poults is divided by the number of hens reported to create a poult-to-hen ratio (PHR). Isabelle explained this is a good measure of turkey nesting success and poult survival.

“Each year, thousands of citizens participate in the survey and we are grateful for their contribution,” Isabelle said. “During the three-month survey, participants typically report sightings of 60,000-80,000 turkeys, which is a testament to the large number of dedicated volunteers that take time to participate in the survey.”

This year’s statewide PHR was 0.8, which was below last year’s figure of 1.5 and the previous five-year average of 1.6. Regionally, PHRs this year ranged from 0.8 in the Northeast, Union Breaks, and West Prairie turkey productivity regions to 1.3 in the Mississippi Lowlands region (see image).

Given the poor hatch throughout the state, Isabelle says fall turkey hunting is going to be more challenging this year.

“Having fewer young birds on the landscape this year will likely result in hunters having to put forth more effort to be successful. This will be especially true in areas that experience good acorn production,” he said.

Isabelle notes where acorns are abundant, turkeys spend more time in forested areas and do not have to range far to locate food, both of which typically result in reduced turkey harvest.

In addition to considering this year’s hatch, Isabelle says hunters should be mindful of trends in regional turkey numbers. During the last five years, turkey numbers have been increasing in portions of north-central Missouri, as well as in the Ozark Border, Ozarks East, and Ozarks West regions (see image).

“Although the 2016 fall prospects are not as positive as years past, October is still a great month to enjoy the outdoors, and fall hunting provides an opportunity to pursue turkeys in the setting of Missouri’s beautiful fall woods, such as MDC’s conservation areas,” Isabelle said.

“Unlike the spring season, when more than 100,000 turkey hunting permits are purchased in Missouri, typically fewer than 15,000 hunters purchase fall firearms turkey permits,” he added.

Results of the 2016 wild turkey brood survey are available at <http://on.mo.gov/2di1PXI>.

Fall archery turkey hunting season runs from Oct. 15 to Nov. 23 to Jan. 15. Shooting hours are from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset with a limit of two turkeys of either sex. Fall firearms turkey season runs Oct. 1-31 from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset with a limit of two turkeys of either sex. Details about fall turkey hunting regulations are found in the 2016 Fall Deer and Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet available wherever hunting permits are sold, from MDC offices and nature centers, or online at <http://on.mo.gov/2d7JPxc>.

Buy permits from vendors around the state, online at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits, or through MDC’s free mobile apps, Mo Hunting and Mo Fishing, available for download through Google Play for Android devices or the App Store for Apple devices.

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