

DELMARVA 20 TURKEY REPORT 23



NON TYPICAL

Outdoor Supply



THE LAND GROUP

THE FUTURE

By Billy Hardesty

Being a passionate outdoorsman has been a mindset of mine for as long as I can remember. I've often thought to myself "what would I be doing for fun and recreation if I didn't love the outdoors?" We're so privileged to live in an area with such diverse outdoor opportunities. From offshore fishing to skinny water light tackle. From stands of oaks and tall pines to thick brushy cutovers with opportunities at bucks as good as damn near anyplace in the country. From low lying cypress swamps to coastal salt marshes and estuaries of the famed Chesapeake Bay, you don't have to look far to find great waterfowl hunting. I wouldn't have wanted to cut my teeth anyplace else growing up.

Now, with two young daughters I find myself hunting and fishing for different reasons. I've always loved sharing experiences with people who don't get to see the things we see as outdoorsmen. There are so many people who will never see the sun come up from a tree stand or a duck blind. They'll never know the excitement of hearing hooves on frosted leaves when it's not quite light enough to see, a thunderous gobble from a wild turkey that snuck in close or the sound of whistling wings cutting air before legal shooting light. I love sharing these moments with my girls. If I never pull the trigger again, I'm completely content watching them do it.

Teaching my kids conservation and the importance of utilizing their harvest was a huge deal for me. It was very important that they know we don't just harvest an animal as a trophy or for fun but for nourishment. When we throw a big juicy back strap on the grill that feeds our family I pump them up "you provided that for us, good job!" The satisfaction is written all over their face.

Getting kids involved can be tricky. On slow days they become discouraged very easily. I try my best to put all of the odds in our favor by scouting, running trail cams, making sure everyone's as comfortable as possible. Some things are naturally out of my control but I can at least be sure we've got the best clothes to keep us warm and dry. Good youth hunting cloths can be tough to find. I've found some great youth apparel from the Mossy Oak online store and Academy Sports. Both sites offer quality gear at affordable prices which is nice beings they're going to outgrow it. Snacks are a must! Finding quiet snacks is the hard part! We've filled jacket pockets full of sunflower seeds or cookies on numerous occasions. Some fun games on a tablet or a phone help break up the monotony of a slow hunt. Make sure the volume is off! Every sit in the stand or the blind isn't going to be full of action. Setting these kids up for success is so important in my opinion to grasping and holding their attention. Some kids just aren't going to be into it, and that's ok. My youngest daughter refused to even try. We took a different avenue of target shooting. She instantly fell in love with it and it soon translated into deer hunting.

We're living in different times where children are so disconnected from Mother Nature and the outdoors. Get them outside, be a mentor, take a kid hunting!



Brynn Hardesty



Brantley Hardesty

On the next pages we will look at data collected for Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. The DNR does a great job of gathering data based on kills and poults per hen each year. This helps them in monitoring turkey populations and estimating reproductive success, which are both key in keeping a healthy turkey population on the Eastern Shore.

***Note that DE did not conduct any reproductive data due to staffing shortages.**

DELAWARE

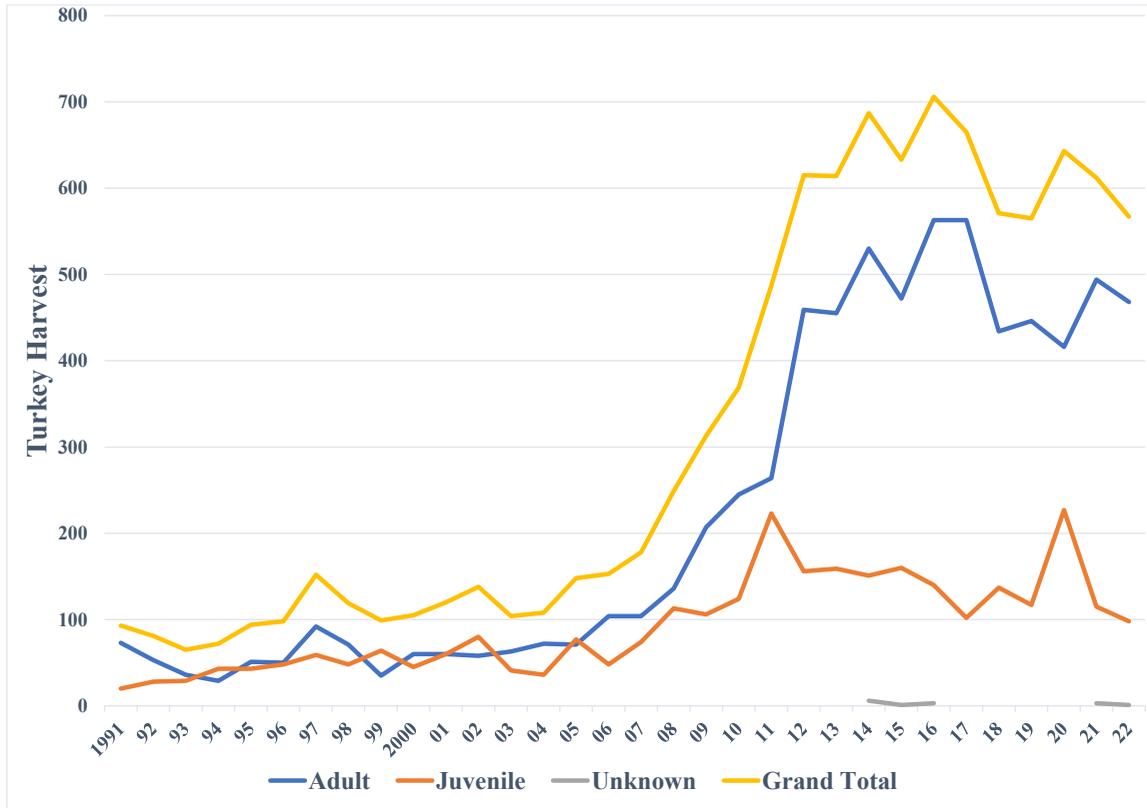
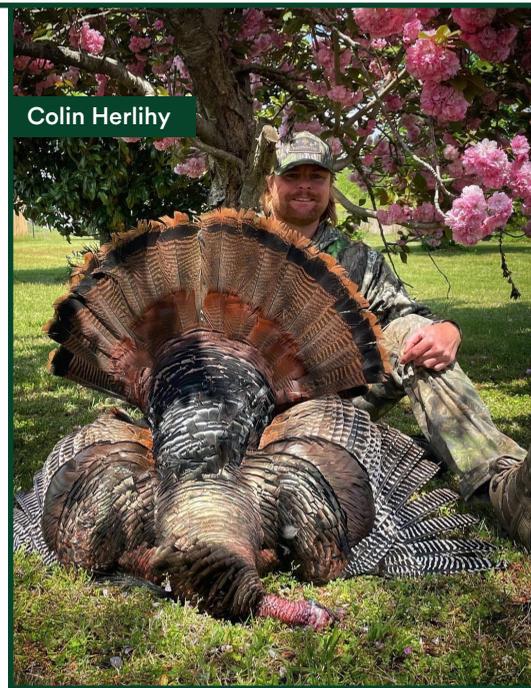
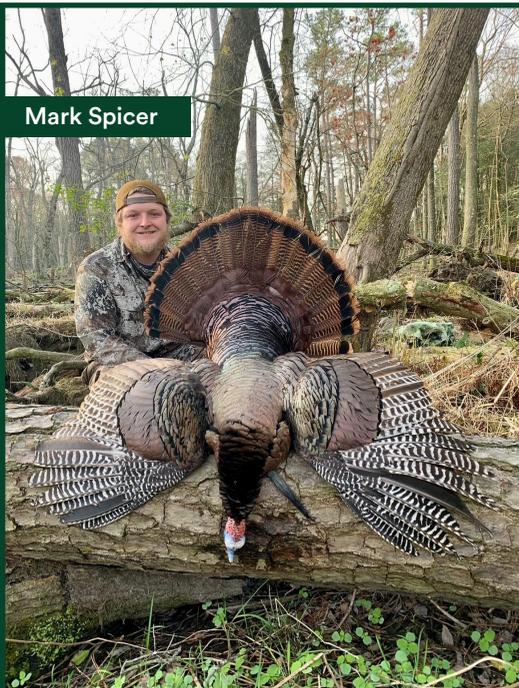
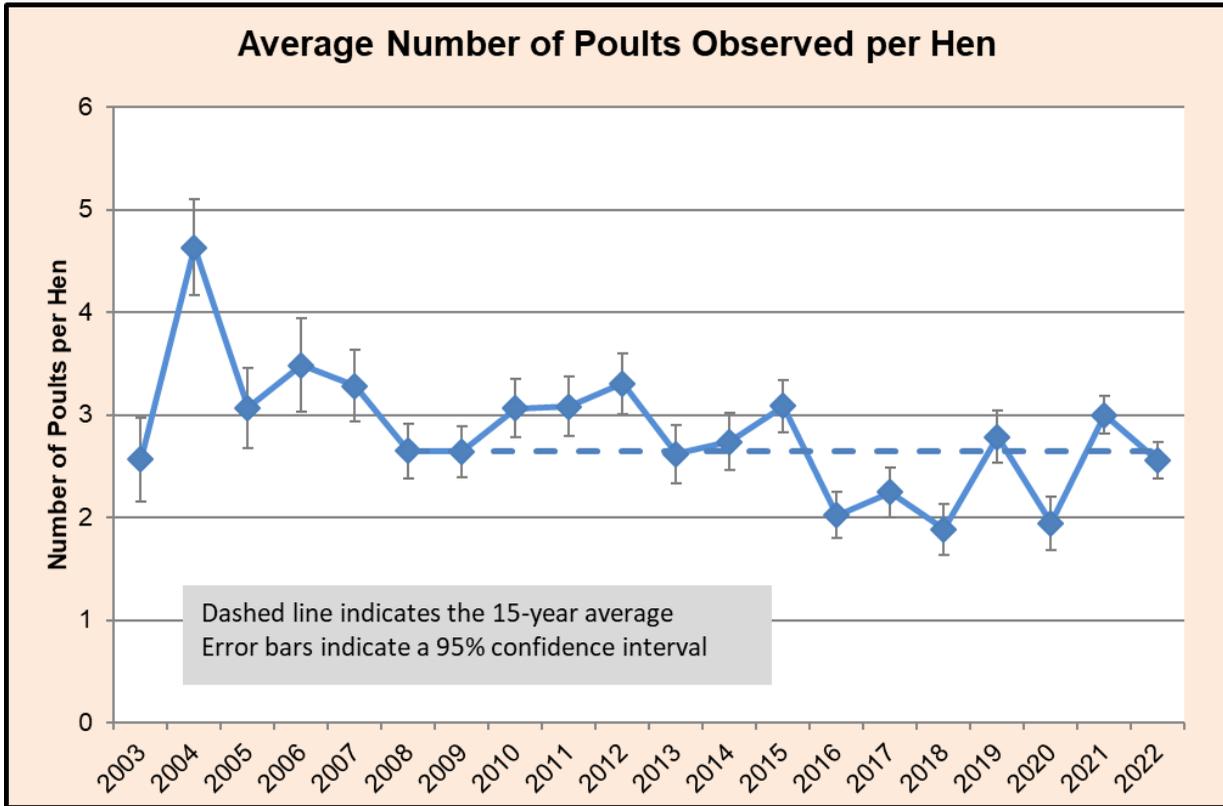


Figure 1.1. Annual harvest of Eastern Wild Turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) in Delaware from 1991 – 2022 classified by age groups (i.e., adult, juvenile, and unknown).

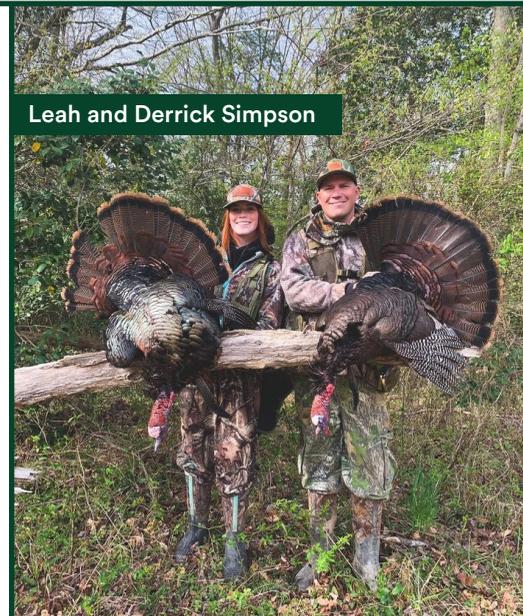
In 2022, 567 wild turkeys were reported harvested, compared to 522 birds from the 2021 season. Adult birds comprised 76.7% of the harvest, with more jakes recorded than the previous year at 23.3%.



MARYLAND

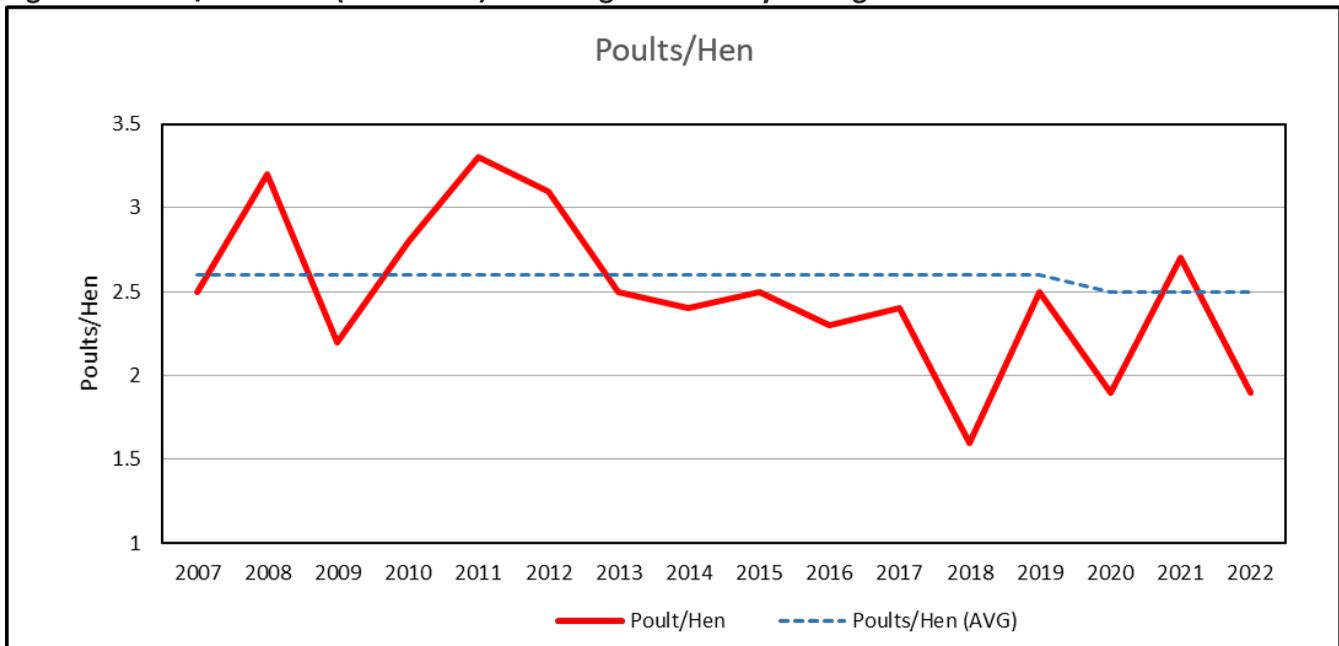


Maryland hunters harvested 4,208 wild turkeys during the spring 2022 season, which was 8% higher than the 2021 harvest and just 2% below the record harvest of 4,303 set in 2020. The percentage of juvenile turkeys or “jakes” reported in the harvest was 24%, the highest level since 2011. Statewide, the 2022 primary reproductive index was estimated at 2.6 poults per hen. This was lower than the 2021 index of 3.0 poults per hen but similar to the 15-year average of 2.7 poults per hen.



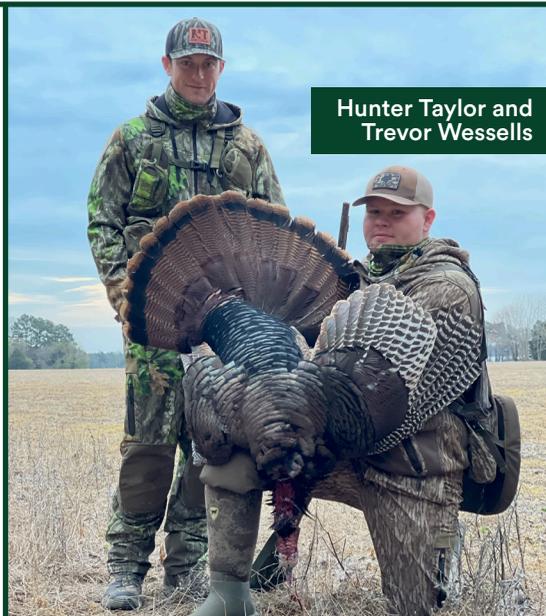
VIRGINIA

Figure 1. Poults/Hen ratio (2007-2022) with long term survey average.



The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) announced a harvest of 19,711 turkeys during the 2022 spring turkey season. This is the fourth highest spring turkey harvest on record, with the three highest harvests having occurred in 2015, 2021 and 2020.

The 2022 harvest was well within DWR staff expectations, and the slightly lower harvest this season appears to be driven by lower participation on opening weekend caused by poor weather. Adult gobblers (those with a beard at least 7" in length) made up 86% of the total harvest, while juvenile gobblers known as "jakes" accounted for 14% of the harvest. The 2022 annual survey suggests reproduction for wild turkey declined to a statewide average of 1.9 poults per hen, falling below the long-term survey average of 2.5 poults per hen.



GETTING IN TIGHT

By Jake Emche

Arguably, the greatest challenge of turkey hunting involves getting into shotgun (or bow) range of a wary gobbler. The turkey has the upper hand over the hunter with their incredible eyesight, hearing, and uncanny ability to survive. In my opinion, calling in a gobbler in the spring is one of the most exhilarating things in the entire world. In nature, a gobbler gobbles to attract hens to him. Convincing him to go against his own nature and to seek out your imitation hen yelps instead is something to be proud of. I've been fortunate enough to experience this a few times and look forward to doing it again every spring.

As turkey hunters know, the gobbler wins the battle the majority of the time. Through lots of trial and error, with a heavy emphasis on the error, I've found that being aggressive and getting in close to the gobbler while he is still in the roost has increased my odds of being able to seal the deal with the King of Spring- the Wild Eastern Gobbler.

I've found many turkey hunters prefer to set up at least 120 yards away from a turkey in his roost due to the fear of spooking the bird and ending the hunt before it even starts. Even though bumping turkeys is frustrating, being aggressive and getting closer to a gobbler is a risk I am willing to take. This method is not always the best option. However, by getting in close to a roosted gobbler, a hunter is minimizing many of the common obstacles that are out of their control, such as hens dragging the gobbler away, or a bird hanging up outside of range, which happen more often than not.

I have not had much success on the Eastern Shore of Maryland getting turkeys to gobble on the limb the evening before I hunt to pinpoint exactly where they are roosted; therefore I rely heavily on my past experiences and preseason scouting. If I know an area where a gobbler has been roosting, or has roosted in the past, I will try to slip in within shotgun range of where I expect him to land. Even if everything doesn't go as planned and he flies down a different way, my chances of calling him inside of 40 yards are much greater if he only needs to come 20 yards instead of 100 if I had set up 120+ yards away.

When trying to get in close to a gobbler the most important thing in my opinion is getting in position early. I try to be situated in my setup at a minimum 45 minutes before legal shooting time, earlier if I am setting up on field edge or the moon is bright.

Turkeys in the pitch dark of the early morning hours do not seem to be bothered by a dim red light shined



down around a hunter's feet as he is quietly slipping through the woods. Those same turkeys may become spooked if they hear a hunter stampeding through the woods, tripping over logs, and cursing up a storm after they face plant into one of the many green briar patches found on the Eastern Shore. For those reasons, I opt for using a dim red light aimed down at my feet to aide me as I slip into my position more stealthily.

Ideally, I try to sit against a tree with some overhanging branches and a larger base to help conceal my outline. Once in position, I quietly move any sticks or branches that will cause discomfort and unnecessary movement while waiting on the bird to fly down. Being comfortable is a major factor in being able to sit undetected while underneath the eyes of a roosted gobbler. Once situated in a spot I feel suitable, I throw in a mouth call, pull up my facemask, put my gloves on, rest the gun on my knee, and wait, motionless. This is not the time to scroll through Instagram or check your snapchats. Your phone should

remain in your pocket, as the backlight glowing on your face and your moving fingers will more than likely alert the nearby turkeys roosted in trees above of your unwanted presence.

As the woods come to life, lets assume your scouting held true and there is a turkey roosted close. The first gobble should honestly frighten you. I have a hard time putting the feeling into words, but you know you are close when you can feel the gobble in your chest and bones. Once you experience it, you will know exactly what I mean, and will never forget the feeling.

After the turkey announces his whereabouts, any necessary last minute moves should be made instantly. If it necessary to spin around to the backside of the tree, or sneak up 20 yards closer- don't wait. At this point you have already decided to be aggressive. Make your mind up and act on the decision. Hesitating in this moment can be fatal to the hunter's success. Use the last bits of fleeting darkness to help mask your final movements. The longer you wait, the better the turkey will be able to pick you out. Once situated, now is the time to be as still as possible, gun should be rested on the knee and you should be ready to fly down.

I try to determine which way the gobbler is facing by listening to his gobble as he spins around on the limb or by putting eyes on him in the tree. If I don't hear any hens, I remain silent for as long as possible. If he is facing a favorable direction, I let him fly down before I call to him. If I hear other hens, I generally do a series of light tree yelps just to let him know I am in the area. If hens are being vocal or I think the gobbler may fly down in an unfavorable direction out of the roost, I will usually do a fly down cackle (a series of excited cuts a hen turkey makes when flying to the ground). If my setup allows it and I have enough cover to not get busted, I will hit my hat on my leg while cackling to imitate the sounds of turkey wings flapping as she flies down to the ground. I want that gobbler to believe that I am the first hen to fly down, that I am excited, and ready to be bred. Usually the fly down cackle will get the gobbler excited, sometimes getting him to fly right in your direction. If the gobbler remains in the roost, I will usually not call anymore till he hits the ground. He now knows a hen is down there, and it's up to him to decide if he wants to come check it out. Overcalling at this time may cause him to remain in the roost, essentially smelling the rat and calling out your bluff.

If the gobbler does decide to fly out of the tree in a favorable direction - that's great. Maybe he lands within gun range and you do a couple clucks to raise his neck up before you squeeze the trigger. Maybe he decides to land just outside of range, and a couple light yelps convince him to come check out the hen that is near. There is also the possibility he lands way out of

range, went to other hens that he heard, or is going away from you. Don't panic just yet. The hunt may not be over. If the latter situation occurs, the second his feet hit the ground I try some excited yelping with cuts mixed in. Timing is everything in this scenario. Even though he has determined to fly down elsewhere, I try to add a little bit of excitement right when he lands to make him second guess his decision and hopefully have him come check out the excited hen before he goes about his day.

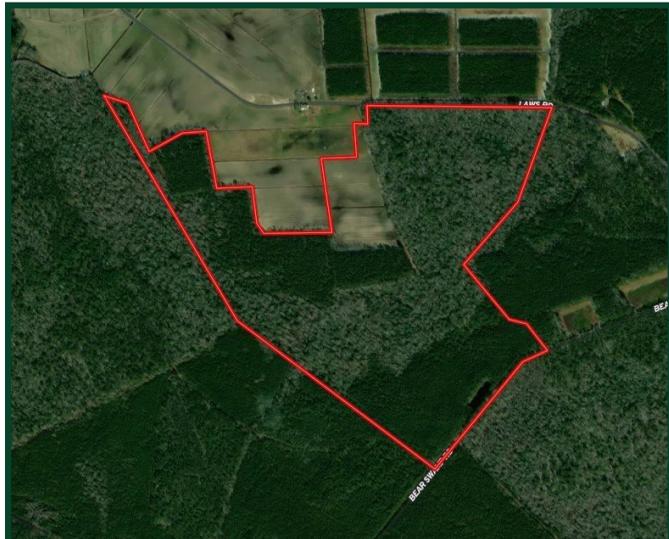
Like every turkey hunting tactic, sometimes the plan doesn't work and the gobbler stays out of range. However, by starting close to him in the morning you minimize the amount of ground he has to walk over in order to get into range. It will always be easier to convince him to come 20 yards instead of a couple hundred yards. In those 20 yards he will be less affected by things working against the hunter, such as hens and natural barriers he does not want to cross. You also may gain some important clues, which could eventually help you seal the deal at some point in the future. You may realize he does in fact have a few hens with him, love struck by his beautiful strutting and drumming, waiting to be bred, and that he may be more vulnerable later in the morning when his hens leave him to go sit on their nest. Or you may figure out he likes to follow an old logging road to a pretty winter wheat field where he can go strut for the rest of the morning. Now you can come up with a new approach, maybe circle around to the direction he headed later in the morning, or try to cut him off on the logging road. You could also try again the next day. As long as he wasn't bumped, there is a chance he may roost in the same area and you will have a better idea of where to set up.

As mentioned above, sometimes it flat out doesn't work. The turkey wins. But sometimes it does work. And when it does, it can be some of the most exciting, fast paced encounters in the spring turkey woods. Nothing beats walking out of the woods with a gobbler over your shoulder as the sun is just starting to rise over the horizon. Oh, and don't forget to send your buddies a few pictures while they are sitting in the woods, praying with all their might to the turkey gods to get the gobbler to come in from 300 yards away.

Spring turkey season is the best time of the year. It only comes once a year, so make the most of it. Take in all the beautiful sounds and sights nature has to offer. Tip your hat to the turkeys that beat you, and learn from your mistakes. Don't be afraid to think outside the box and try something new. Who knows, it may improve your odds against the King of Spring.

Be Safe. Shoot Straight. Good luck this spring.

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- Approximately 12 +/- acres of tillable land with the remaining 151 acres in standing timber
- Timber is a mixed stand of hardwoods in the interior surrounded by managed pine
- Numerous access trails with access points from two public roads make for ideal hunting opportunities for Whitetail and Turkey
- No conservation easements

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For More Information Contact: Doug Williams | doug@thelandgroup.us | 410-726-1831

2023 OUTLOOK

Looking at the numbers from two years ago in 2021, the poult per hen rate was above average. The reason I am mentioning 2021 is because a Jake becomes a long beard, gobbler, or strutter (however you want to say it) in their second year. So there should be a good amount of full fanned birds out there this year based on the 2021 numbers. Looking at the data from 2015 until now, the poult rate has gone back and forth from below average to average/above average every year in each state, so I don't see much of a concern in the below average numbers from this years summer observations.

From all of us at Non Typical and The Land Group, we hope you have a great turkey season. Keep at it - you never know when that bird will sound off. The last day of the season can be just as good as the first day of the sesason, so stay at it and you should be able to bag some birds this year.

Happy Hunting,
Non Typical & The Land Group

NON TYPICAL



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