

TRACKING TURKEYS

Wildlife biologists need input from Alabama hunters

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

The state needs help from its turkey hunters and one lucky person will win a shotgun for the effort.

Since 2014, state biologists asked Alabama turkey hunters to participate in the Avid Turkey Hunter Survey. Anyone can sign up to participate, but the state wants passionate turkey hunters who will spend at least 10 days in the woods looking for gobblers this season. The state also needs participants who hunt different private and public properties around Alabama. Those selected to participate will need to keep track of all the turkeys they see or hear and report it back to the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources with additional data.

“Each time a person hunts, that hunter is asked to keep a record of the number of turkeys that hunter sees, the numbers of gobblers he or she hears, harvest data and other information,” explained Steve Barnett, the Alabama DCNR Wild Turkey Project Leader in Spanish Fort. “I’ll send participants some data sheets they can use in the field. Then, they need to take that data and submit a report on the internet. It’s pretty easy.”

Annual turkey report

The information collected will help wildlife managers better understand turkey population densities, distribution and other factors, such as reproductive success and habitat conditions. Each participant will also receive a copy of *Full Fans and Sharp Spurs*, the annual turkey report published by the state. The publication contains details on the survey observations and other information of interest to avid turkey hunters in Alabama. People can view the most recent report at www.outdooralabama.com/wild-turkey.

“Anybody in the state can take part in the Alabama Avid Turkey Hunter Survey, but they must follow certain rules,” remarked Brandon Bobo, a NWTf biologist in Oxford, Ala. “The details we receive will give us a much better grasp on breeding activity, location of birds and other informa-



A hunter admires the spurs on a turkey he killed.

Photo by John N. Felsler

tion. I carry a little booklet with me to record data in the field and write down information while I’m hunting so I can report it later.”

In addition, sportsmen might see some turkeys wearing unusual “backpacks” or leg jewelry in parts of Alabama. During the last several years, researchers fitted more than 200 wild turkeys with tracking devices and released them on public lands. In cooperation with the NWTf and Auburn University, researchers hope to learn more about turkey gobbling activities, nesting, survival rates, reproduction, population trends and other factors. Data obtained could affect how the state structures future turkey hunting seasons and harvest limits.

The turkeys were released on Barbour, Oakmulgee and James D. Martin-Skyline wildlife management areas. Barbour WMA covers 28,214 acres of Barbour and Bullock counties near Clayton. Oakmulgee spreads across 44,500 acres of Bibb, Hale, Perry and Tuscaloosa counties southeast of Tuscaloosa. In northeast Alabama, Skyline includes 60,732 acres of Jackson County near Scottsboro.

“Barbour has a lot of turkeys and

intensive management,” Barnett stated. “The NWTf has done a lot of habitat work in Oakmulgee and the Talladega National Forest. Skyline is also a pretty good area to hunt. Part of the information we need is harvest rates. If hunters shoot a turkey with a device or leg band, we request that they report those harvests to us as soon as possible.”

Great turkey area

Alabama offers sportsmen some of the best eastern wild turkey hunting in the nation. Turkeys live in every county in the state. Some public areas might impose different season dates, stricter bag limits or other different regulations so always check the regulations before hunting anywhere and remember to report kills for Game Check.

For Game Check information, see www.outdooralabama.com/gamecheck. For more information on participating in the survey, contact Barnett at 251-626-5474 or send an email to Steve.Barnett@dcnr.alabama.gov. For more information on the National Wild Turkey Federation, see www.nwtf.org/about/state/alabama.