

It's turkey time!

Flooded swamps shouldn't affect numbers this spring

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Heavy and frequent rains during the fall of 2018 and into the winter flooded much of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. High waters possibly moved turkeys, but the birds can escape to higher ground.

"Turkeys have wings so they can get above the water or fly somewhere else," advised Steve Barnett, the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division wild turkey project leader. "Many turkeys in the delta probably moved to adjacent uplands associated with their home territories. After the water drops, turkeys filter back into their home territories. There could be some good hunting in the swamp after the water recedes."

Periodic floods can actually help a wetland area like the delta. Sustained floods kill off underbrush and clear out debris. That creates open areas after the land dries. After the water goes down, those areas grow back healthier. Turkeys get in those open areas to strut and feed upon bugs, buds and any other things they can find.

Since high water occurred before turkeys began nesting, the flood conditions shouldn't greatly affect the turkey population in the two delta wildlife management areas. However, river systems like the delta traditionally flood in the spring. High water at the wrong time could impact turkey populations.

"The delta turkey population is pretty good," Barnett reported. "In south Alabama, hens won't start looking for places to nest until late March. If flooding events occur prior to nesting, that won't affect the breeding season as much because the hens might have an opportunity to nest elsewhere. The problem is when the hens have already laid a clutch of eggs and are incubating them when high water comes. If that happens, hopefully, those hens will renest somewhere else."

Sportsmen could still enjoy a great turkey season in delta. The best hunting typically occurs in the higher and drier Upper Delta WMA near Stockton,



Jake Mardis shows off the turkey he bagged.

Photo by John N. Felsher

but people could still find turkeys in the more swampy Lower Delta north of the Mobile Causeway. The Upper Delta contains more hardwood bottomlands and uplands, but people might still

need to reach the best areas by boat.

South Alabama sportsmen might also try to bag a gobbler in the Perdido

See **TURKEY**, 31