



Wild turkey production in Texas fair despite hot, dry summer

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A low harvest rate, combined with a wet and mild winter, led to an increase in the number of wild turkeys on the landscape for hunters this fall.

The general fall wild turkey hunting season in Texas opens Nov. 4.

“It’s been an odd couple of years. Last year, we started off pretty dry going into the spring. There was not much production,” Jason Hardin, Wild Turkey Program leader for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), said. “Going into 2023, we were in a lot better condition. We had a mild winter, a wet winter. Things were greening up early, and it really set the stage for those hens to get in good physical condition.”

Because fewer hens attempted to nest in 2022, there were more hens going into the nesting season this year.

“Every day they spend on the nest, the rate of mortality goes up because that’s the most vulnerable period of their life,” Hardin told the [Texas Farm Bureau Radio Network](#). “Not nesting in 2022 resulted in not a lot of production and not a lot of young birds this past year, but it meant we had a lot of birds going into the nesting season this year.”

The nesting season started out well thanks to the wetter weather this spring, but triple-digit temperatures in June and July changed everything.

“We saw a lot of heat and a lot of days in the triple digits—in some cases 30 days straight—and that really shuts down the nesting effort,” Hardin said. “Fortunately, we had a lot of nesting going in, and we got a fair amount of production.”

Each year, TPWD performs a summer turkey survey to get an idea of how many hens and poults are on the landscape.

“We went from about half a poult per hen last year, which is dismal, to almost a three-fold increase in the number of poults we’re seeing on the landscape,” Hardin said. “There’s going to be quite a few young birds out there.”

There were a lot of two-year-old turkeys in the population last year, and many of those are still out there this year.

“We saw our harvest bump up a little bit based on the number of two-year-old birds on the landscape,” Hardin said. “We’re going to be missing that two-year-old bird component for the most part going into this fall and spring due to the lack of production last year and a little bit of harvest that occurs.”

A statewide banding survey from 2015 to 2020 revealed the turkey harvest rate in Texas is low. Eighty-seven percent of male turkeys carry over from year-to-year.

“They aren’t harvested. You have a little bit of mortality here and there, natural mortality, getting hit by cars (and) a couple of those gobblers are eaten by predators, but for the most part, we see really good carryover on adult males,” Hardin said. “There should be quite a few older birds out there on the landscape this year.”

In the fall, wild turkey hunting is only open in the Rio Grande Valley, parts of west, south, central and north Texas and the east side of the Texas Panhandle. There is no fall season in East Texas and Far West Texas.

“We have lots of birds across the state of Texas, especially when you think west of I-25 and east of the Pecos River, all the way from the Panhandle down to the valley of South Texas,” Hardin said. “If I had the opportunity to pick a couple of places where I’d really like to go hunting, it would be in that northern Edwards Plateau around Concho and Reynolds counties between the Cross Timbers, Edwards Plateau and the Rolling Plains.”

That includes Concho, Coleman and Reynolds counties going south into the Edwards Plateau around Schleicher County, Mason, Llano and Menard.

In South Texas, Kenedy, Willacy and Brooks counties are good areas to hunt turkeys.

“If you have the opportunity to get on those areas in South Texas and the Edwards Plateau and up in the edge of the Rolling Plains and Cross Timbers that I mentioned, those can be really phenomenal hunting areas with lots of birds,” Hardin said.

There are no changes to turkey hunting regulations this year.

“I always like to remind hunters to not only be safe and have fun, but if you have the opportunity to report your bird to the My Texas Hunt Harvest (app or website), that’s a big help for Texas Parks and Wildlife and the wild turkey program,” Hardin said. “That helps us track distribution of those birds, how those birds may be expanding during good years or contracting back to those watersheds during the poor years.”

Hunters are encouraged to check the Outdoor Annual for the bag limit.

“It is an annual bag limit,” Hardin said. “In some counties, you can only harvest one bird. The sex you can harvest depends on where you are in the state, which county you are in. Always pay close attention to those bag limits.”

Fall turkey hunting season dates

Archery Only Fall Turkey Season
Sept. 30 – Nov. 3

Youth Only Season—North Zone
Oct. 28-29, Jan. 8-21

Youth Only Season—South Zone
Oct. 28-29, Jan. 22 - Feb. 4

General Fall Turkey Season—North Zone
Nov. 4 - Jan. 7

General Fall Turkey Season—South Zone
Nov. 4 - Jan. 21

Brooks, Kenedy, Kleberg and Willacy counties
Nov. 4 - Feb. 25

[View the fall turkey hunting zones.](#)