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Turkey Season Harvest Did Well in 1st Week

APRIL 29TH 2013 BY DEE LOFLIN

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*Submitted by
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Jefferson City, Missouri - In spite of less than ideal weather, hunters shot 21,437 turkeys during the first week of Missouri's three-week spring hunting season.

This year's first-week harvest is 328 fewer than last year, a 1.5-percent decrease. That small difference is fairly insignificant, according to Resource Scientist Jason Isabelle with the Missouri Department of Conservation. He says the first-week harvest number is encouraging considering the weather that many hunters had to contend with.

"We had some very challenging hunting conditions for much of the week," says Isabelle, "but still managed to harvest about the same number of turkeys that we did on opening week last year. At one point during the week, we were 17 percent behind where we were last year. But the improved conditions that we had this past weekend, particularly on Saturday, helped us to nearly catch up to where we were at this point one year ago."

Isabelle, who oversees the Conservation Department's turkey management program, says last year's turkey harvest was the second to show an increase since 2004. Jakes, as 1-year-old male turkeys are commonly known, made up 17

percent of this year's first-week harvest compared to 26 percent last year.

“Jakes made up a smaller percentage of the opening week harvest than last year,” says Isabelle, “but the difference does not necessarily indicate that we have fewer jakes on the landscape. Prior to 2011's hatch, we hadn't had good turkey production for a number of years. Because of the improved hatch of 2011, jakes were readily available during the 2012 season, and adult gobbler abundance was lower than it typically would be, so naturally hunters shot more jakes. We had a second year of improved nesting success in 2012 and a good carry-over of birds from 2011. Hunters found more 2-year-old gobblers this year, and that took some pressure off of our 2012 crop of jakes.”

Isabelle says weather could still hold down this year's harvest, but with relatively normal conditions, especially on weekends, hunters could easily top last year's end-of-season turkey kill.

“If the weather cooperates, I could certainly see a spring harvest that exceeds the last couple of years,” he says. “Hunters still have the majority of the season ahead of them. As the season progresses, there will be more hens nesting, which leaves gobblers by themselves and more likely to respond to hunters' calls. This fact, coupled with less hunting pressure during the last couple weeks of the season, can make for some outstanding hunting conditions.”

Missouri's top three turkey harvest counties in the first week of the season were Franklin with 560 turkeys checked, Texas with 444, and Ste. Genevieve with 413. The Conservation Department recorded no firearms-related hunting incidents during the first week of the season.

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