

Division of Fish & Wildlife announces Delaware's 2016 wild turkey season produced new state record harvest of 706 birds

DOVER – Delaware's month-long spring turkey season, which ended May 7, yielded 706 birds – a new state record, surpassing the previous record of 687 in 2014, DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife announced today. Delaware allows only the harvest of turkeys with beards – almost always males – during the spring season, the only time of year turkeys may be hunted here.

“The recovery of the wild turkey in Delaware is a remarkable conservation success, made possible by the stewardship of hunters and the Delaware Chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation,” said Division of Fish & Wildlife Director David Saveikis. “Such stewardship includes the Division using hunting license revenues and federal funds derived from the purchase of hunting equipment to restore and sustain the state's wild turkey population, which helped establish the sport of turkey hunting in Delaware.”

“The turkey harvest really started climbing in 2005, and we have experienced a five-fold increase in harvest over the last decade,” said Joe Rogerson, Division of Fish & Wildlife biologist and program manager with Species Conservation and Research. “The growing popularity of turkey hunting combined with a robust turkey population and abundant habitat has provided a fantastic spring hunting opportunity.”

Highlights of the 2016 season included the harvest of 36 “non-

typical” turkeys, consisting of gobblers with more than one beard and one turkey with two spurs on each of its legs. Since Delaware opened turkey hunting in 1991, this was the first turkey harvested in Delaware that had multiple spurs on a leg, as nearly all male turkeys have one spur on each leg. Of the birds with multiple beards, the majority – 36 – had two beards, 10 had three beards and three had four beards.

Birds were harvested in 17 of 18 wildlife management zones. Three zones stood out as turkey “hot spots” – zones 4 and 6 in western Kent County, and zone 11 between Seaford and Georgetown in Sussex County – accounting for 38 percent of the total statewide harvest. Zone 1A, which is in New Castle County north of I-95/295, was the only zone where no birds were harvested.

This year, nearly nine out of 10 birds harvested in Delaware came from private land – 86.3 percent of the 706 turkeys harvested. Hunters also were successful on public lands, with 92 birds bagged. Quality hunting opportunities on public land were available statewide as evidenced by turkeys being harvested from 20 different public land areas.

For hunters planning ahead, the 2017 wild turkey season will start Saturday, April 8 and run through Saturday, May 6, with the special youth and disabled hunter day set for Saturday, April 1. Also, before hunting wild turkeys in Delaware, hunters are required to take a turkey hunter education class. For more information, go to [Delaware Hunter Education Courses](#).

In addition to setting overall turkey harvest records, Delaware hunters also harvested a record 14,681 deer during the 2015/16 hunting season.

“To set records for the overall harvest of both deer and turkeys during the same hunting season is certainly a testament to effective wildlife management and the great opportunities available to hunters for these two important

game species," Rogerson said.

For more information on wild turkeys in Delaware, please contact Joe Rogerson, Division of Fish & Wildlife, at 302-735-3600.

The wild turkey: A Delaware conservation success story

Beginning in early 1984, with support from the National Wild Turkey Federation, DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife biologists released 34 wild-trapped turkeys from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Vermont into Sussex and Kent counties. Reintroductions continued through the 1990s, and once the population had established a foothold in Delaware, a hunting season was opened in 1991. Today, Delaware has a healthy statewide population estimated at 6,000 birds.

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