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'Strong harvest' expected for wild turkey hunting season

By TOM LATEK, Kentucky Today

Mar 18, 2024



Wild turkey season runs from April 13 to May 5.

FRANKFORT, Ky. (KT) – Spring is just around the corner and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources reminds hunters that means the spring wild turkey hunting season in the state is also coming soon.

Kentucky's 2024 youth-only season opens to hunters ages 15 and younger the weekend of April 6-7; the general season runs April 13 through May 5. This spring, hunters in the state should anticipate the kind of classic spring turkey season for which Kentucky is known.

“I expect a strong harvest on par with Kentucky’s averages,” said Zak Danks, wild turkey and grouse program coordinator for Kentucky Fish and Wildlife.

He noted the 2023 spring season was more successful than anticipated. “Things will be back to normal this year,” Danks stated. “Our statewide turkey hatch has been stable the past two years after the bump in 2021, which is consistent with other states across the region.”

Kentucky turkey hunters harvested an impressive 35,655 birds in spring of 2023, the state’s second highest total harvest on record. It was 21 percent higher than the three-year average, 23 percent more than the five-year average and an 18 percent increase over the ten-year average.

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife monitors wild turkey reproduction through annual summer brood surveys, which help biologists make season predictions each year based on the ratio of hens to poults observed during the summer months.

The exceptional poult hatch of 2021, a ratio of 3.2 poults per hen, led to the boost in excitable two-year-old gobbler activity on the landscape in 2023. When it comes to this season’s jakes, the 2022 brood survey resulted in 2.3 poults per hens, a ratio which has stayed consistent 2019 through 2023 besides the spike in 2021.

“There’s plenty of gobbling to be heard, but due to a solid mast crop last fall and the recent mild winter, birds will simply have less incentive to move,” said Danks. From a hunting perspective, seasons of above-average mast crops tend to correlate with less wildlife movement. This means that hunters will want to plan on extra scouting trips this season.”

Mast refers to the fruit of trees, such as nuts and acorns, and is especially important to wildlife during spring breeding. Kentucky’s 2023 mast survey saw an overall higher mast production last fall than the previous year.

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