



WILD TURKEY OBSERVATION SURVEY SUMMARY

2025

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has conducted an annual summer wild turkey observation survey since 1993. The primary purpose of this long-term survey is to estimate reproductive success, but other important information can be obtained from the data. Like most wildlife species, turkeys depend on annual reproduction to add new individuals to the population. This survey, along with other sources of data, allows managers to monitor long-term turkey population trends and better explain and predict annual or regional changes.

Thanks to all the volunteers and DNR staff that assisted with this survey

RESULTS AT-A-GLANCE

Total number of turkeys recorded:

4,512

Number of poult per hen:

2.0

Percentage of hens with poult:

54%

Number of poult per brood:

3.7

Regions with highest production:

Southern, Upper Eastern Shore



SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Survey forms and a link to the online form are distributed to DNR personnel, previous participants, and the public via email and social media. The survey is conducted during the months of July and August when broods are most easily observed and age can be readily determined. For each sighting, participants record the county and number of hens, poult (young of the year), gobblers and unidentified turkeys observed.

Data are reviewed and analyzed using standardized guidelines to minimize bias or inaccuracies in the results. An annual production index is calculated as the average number of poult observed per adult hen, which includes hens without young. Other metrics, such as the average number of poult per brood and the percentage of hens observed with young, are also calculated to help assess reproductive success.

RESULTS

In 2025, participants reported a total of 4,512 wild turkeys, which was considerably lower than the 7,930 turkeys observed in 2024. While this decrease may partly reflect lower turkey numbers, participation also dropped (423 participants compared to 614 in 2024). Even so, the sample size remains high relative to pre-2021 surveys, when the online data form was not yet available. The 761 observations collected this year provide a reliable dataset for assessing reproductive trends.

Statewide, the 2025 primary reproductive index was estimated at 2.0 pouls per hen. This was below the 2024 index (2.6 pouls per hen) and 15-year average (2.5 pouls per hen). The poult per hen ratio includes hens that were not observed with any pouls and is generally considered the best index of overall reproductive success. The number of hens observed with young (54%) and the number of pouls observed per brood (3.7) were also below average, indicating lower nesting success and poult survival this summer.

Most regions observed moderate production with 2.0 to 2.3 pouls per hen, except for the Lower Eastern Shore Region where production was considerably lower. Poult per hen ratios at or above 2.0 can be considered a general threshold where production should be adequate to replace typical annual losses of adult turkeys. The highest reproductive success was noted in the Southern and Upper Eastern Shore regions.

Various factors can impact wild turkey reproduction annually including weather patterns, habitat quality, and predator communities. In 2025, heavy rainfall during the critical peak nesting period (late April – early June) in many parts of the state likely reduced nesting success. Some research suggests that wet weather may increase predation rates on nests, likely because moisture enhances predators' ability to detect scent.

Long-term survey results indicate a gradual decline in turkey productivity since the early 2000s. This trend is likely related to declining nesting and brooding habitat quality and possible shifts in predator populations. Over the last decade, reproduction appears to have stabilized, though at a lower level than in previous decades. **Despite below-average productivity in 2025, the moderate reproductive output observed in 2021–2024 should help sustain healthy populations across most of Maryland.**

This survey is useful for assessing statewide and regional trends in reproduction, but local weather and habitat can impact populations differently in certain areas.

More detailed information and regional results can be found below.

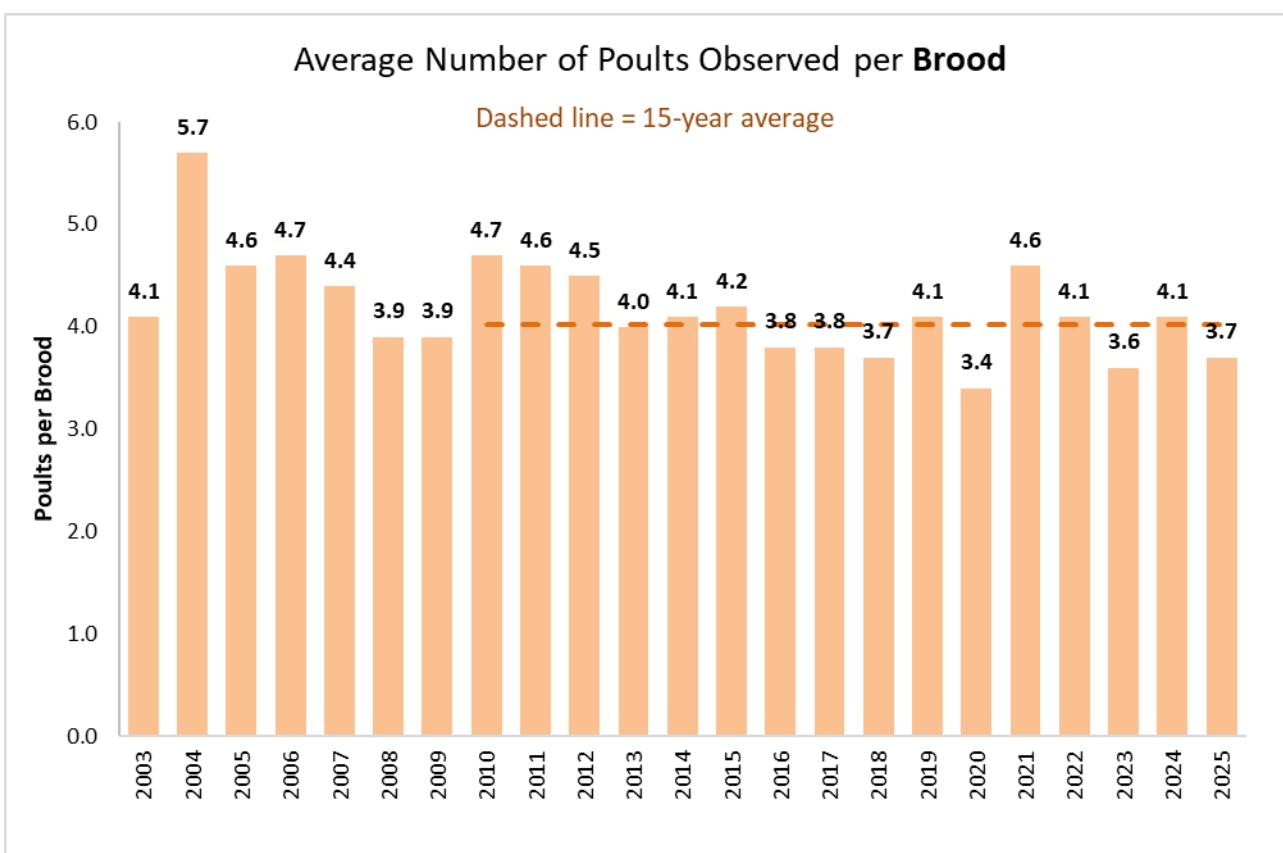
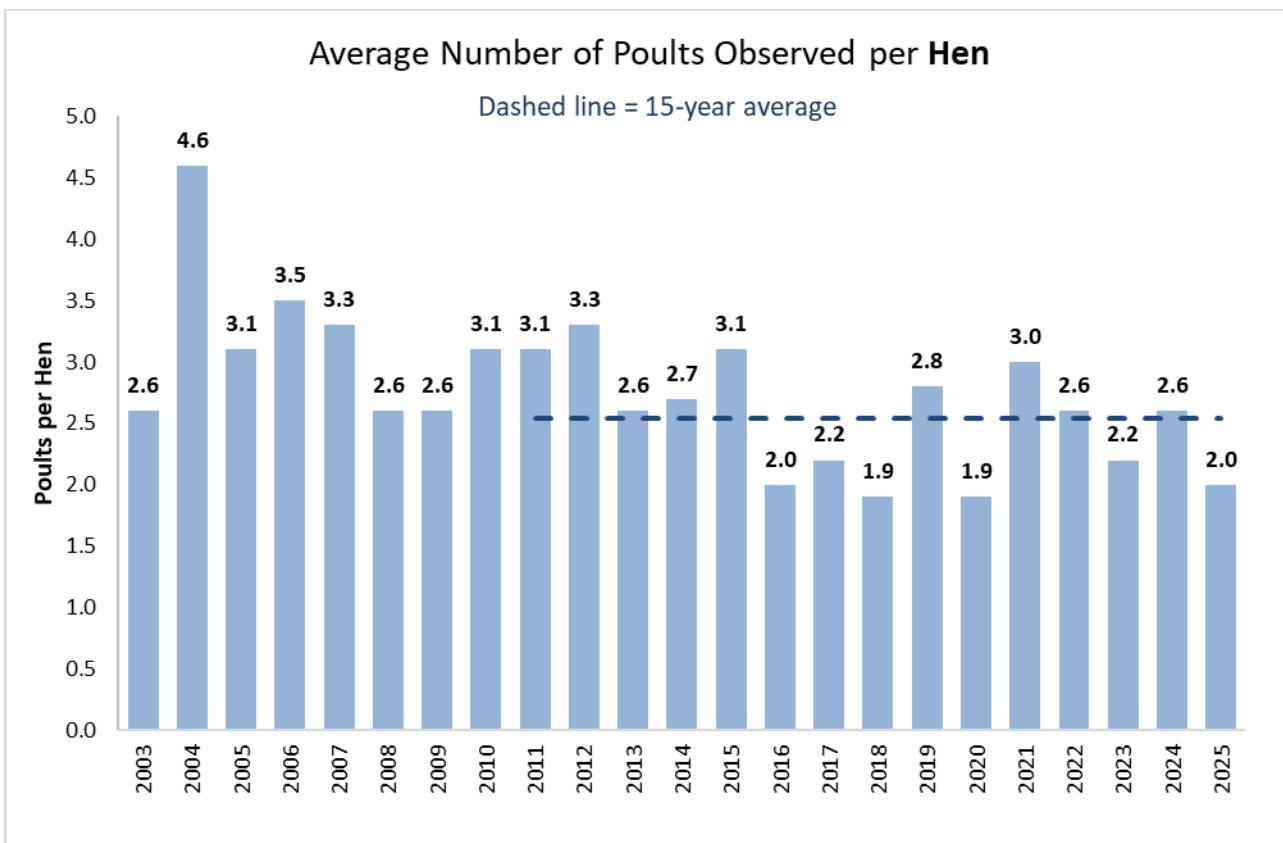


Table 1. Statewide Wild Turkey Observation Survey data, 2016-2025

Year	No. of Participants	No. of Observations	Turkeys Observed					Percent of Hens Observed w/ Brood	Average No. Poulets per Hen	Average No. Poulets per Brood	Gobbler: Hen Ratio
			Hens	Poulets	Gobblers	Unidentified	Total				
2016	91	644	1176	1979	708	25	3888	51.6	2.0	3.8	0.60
2017	84	578	940	1919	544	12	3415	59.7	2.3	3.8	0.58
2018	99	502	851	1298	419	14	2582	47.9	1.9	3.7	0.49
2019	91	553	899	2403	472	14	3788	72.1	2.8	4.1	0.53
2020	80	420	766	1265	390	9	2430	56.1	1.9	3.4	0.51
2021	737	1216	2225	6334	531	74	9164	68.9	3.0	4.6	0.24
2022	648	1144	2068	4378	838	60	7344	64.6	2.6	4.1	0.41
2023	684	1157	2171	4131	820	38	7160	63.2	2.2	3.6	0.38
2024	614	1123	2143	5152	592	43	7930	66.5	2.6	4.1	0.28
2025	423	761	1464	2389	620	39	4512	54.2	2.0	3.7	0.42
15-year Average	266	709	1298	2939	550	28	4815	64.5	2.5	4.0	0.46

Table 2. Regional Wild Turkey Observation Survey data, 2025

	No. of Observations	Turkeys Observed					Percent of Hens Observed w/ Brood	Average No. Poulets per Hen	Average No. Poulets per Brood	Gobbler: Hen Ratio
		Hens	Poulets	Gobblers	Unidentified	Total				
Western	186	338	552	132	6	1028	51.2	2.0	3.7	0.39
Central	119	193	334	69	11	607	56.0	2.0	3.8	0.36
Southern	135	256	505	153	19	933	68.0	2.3	3.9	0.60
Upper ES	203	422	697	136	1	1256	54.0	2.2	3.8	0.32
Lower ES	118	255	301	130	2	688	43.5	1.3	3.3	0.51

¹ Regions defined as:

Western – Garrett, Allegany, Washington

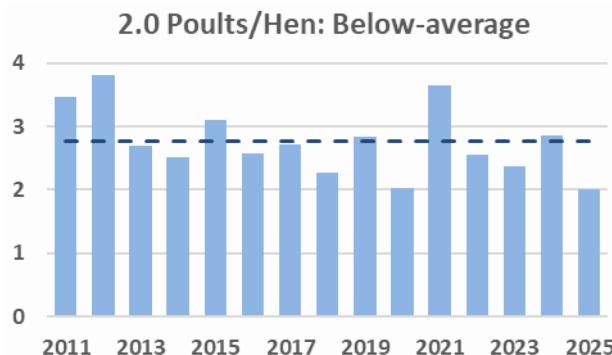
Central – Frederick, Carroll, Baltimore, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Anne Arundel

Southern – Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's

Upper Eastern Shore – Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Caroline

Lower Eastern Shore – Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, Somerset

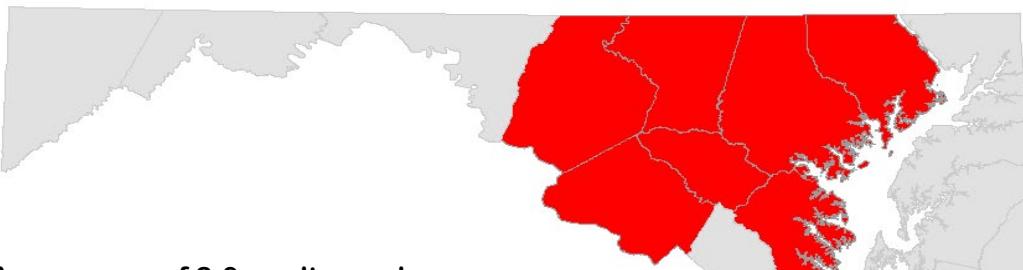
Western Region: Garrett, Allegany, and Washington



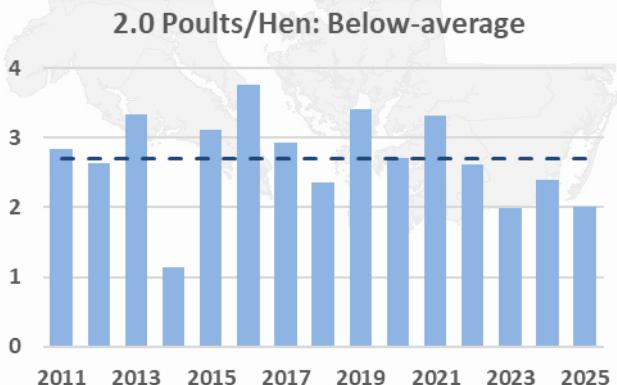
Observers in the western three counties reported an all-time regional low of 2.0 poulets per hen. Only about one-half of adult hens were seen with a brood, indicating poor nesting success. Populations in the western region have been strong for many years due to consistent poult to hen ratios above 2.0. Although the lower reproductive success observed may result in slightly smaller flock sizes this year, it should not cause any major declines for the region.

Central Region:

Frederick, Carroll, Baltimore, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Anne Arundel

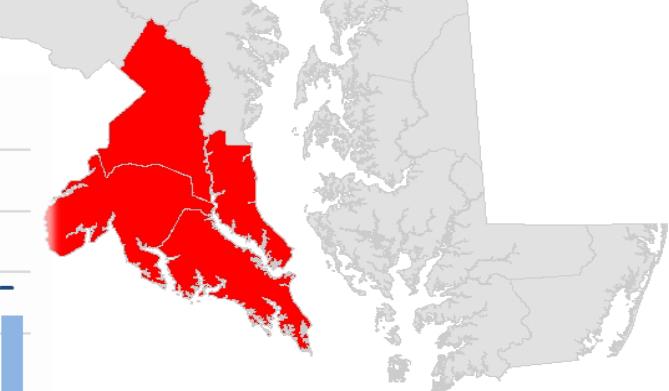
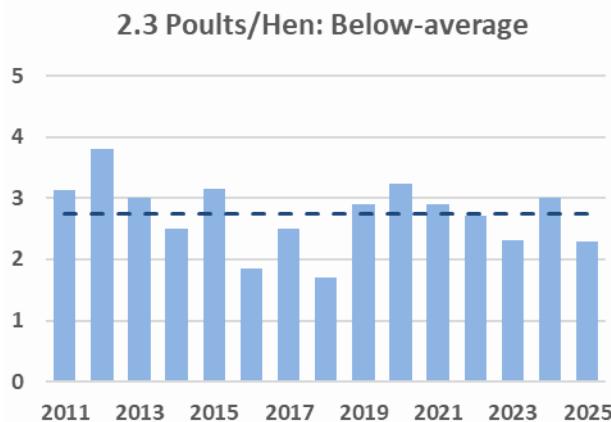


An average of 2.0 poulets per hen were observed in the Central Region, below both the 2024 index and the region average. Nesting success and poult survival appeared to be similar to the statewide average this year. Central region turkey populations have grown significantly over the last 15 years, but the reduced production noted in the last 3 years will likely slow population growth.

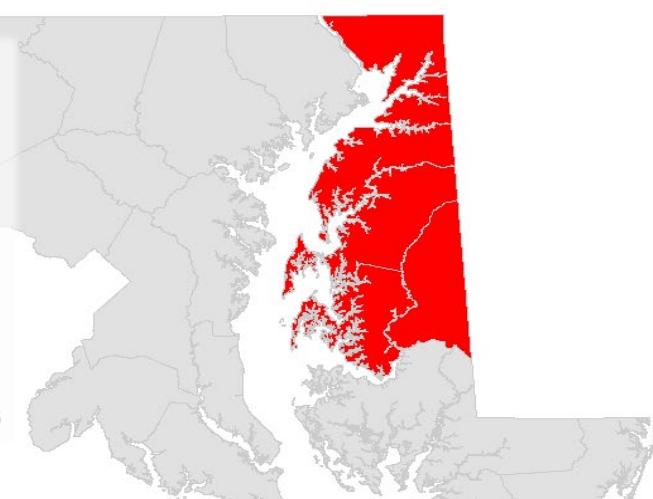
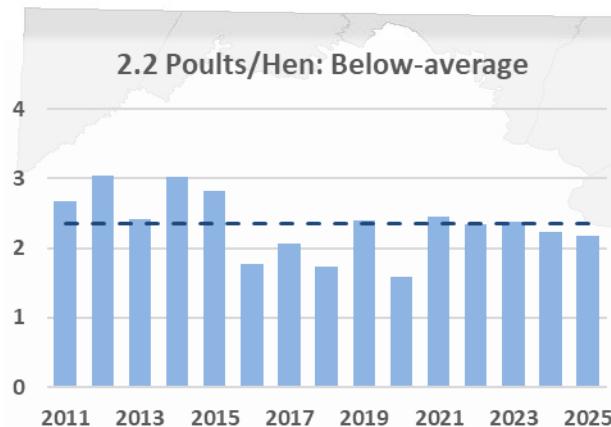


Southern Region: Prince George's, Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's

Although the Southern Region's poult per hen ratio was a modest 2.3 poults per hen, it was the highest in the state this year. A high percentage of hens were seen with poultts (68%), indicating better nesting success than other regions. Production indices have been above 2 poults per hen in the region since 2019, which should translate into continued strong turkey numbers.



Upper Eastern Shore: Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Caroline



Survey participants on the Upper Eastern Shore reported an average of 2.2 poults per hen, just slightly below the region average. Nesting success and poult survival has been remarkably consistent in this region over the last 5 years. Like other regions, the rapid population growth seen in the early 2000s has slowed. But the moderate production indices above 2 poults per hen each year should help maintain good turkey numbers.

Lower Eastern Shore: Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, Somerset

Reproductive success was poor in the Lower Eastern Shore region with only 1.3 poults reported per hen. This is the lowest index recorded since 2016 and well below the regional average. Lower turkey populations due to poor production in 2016-2018 seemed to be rebounding in many areas during recent years. Unfortunately, this year's poor production may result in another noticeable drop.

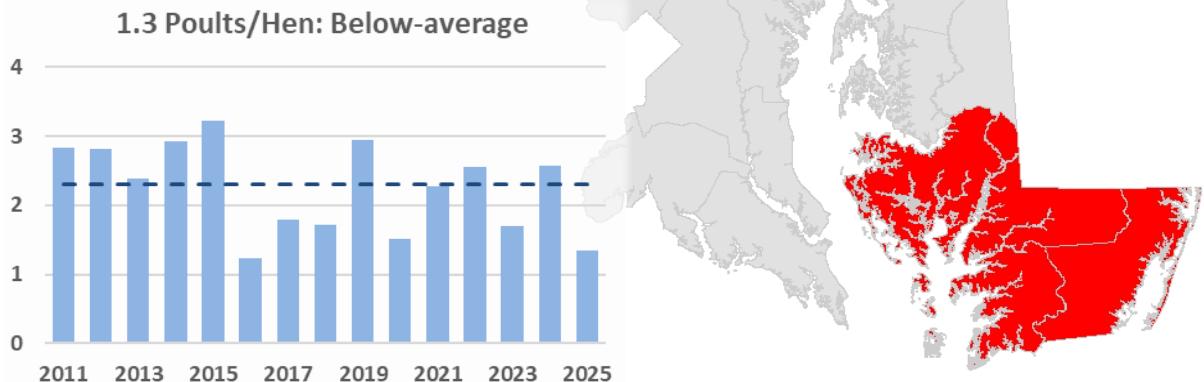


Photo Credit: Greg Sharp

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