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# Fall turkey season begins Tuesday

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icGobble, gobble, gobble.nm

If that sounds like music to your ears, you must be counting the hours to Tuesday morning, when the autumn turkey season opens in the greater portion of Upstate New York.

Unfortunately, prospects aren't as bright this fall as they were a year ago.

The state's hunters killed 7,501 bearded turkeys during the May spring season. That's the smallest May harvest since 1993, when a total of 6,705 birds were tagged.

Before, during and after the spring hunt, turkeys in most areas of the state endured one of their worst reproductive seasons in years. Cold, wet weather is bad news for nesting hens, and in view of our soggy spring, most experienced observers expect turkey flocks to be noticeably smaller in the near future.

Dr. William A. Porter, the nationally recognized turkey researcher who works for the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is predicting a 29 percent decline in the statewide turkey population this fall.

"It was not a great spring for nesting and brood-rearing," Porter said.

He and his colleagues base their annual forecast on a computer model, designed by former SUNY-ESF graduate student Stephen Roberts, that accounts for heating degree days, rainfall and other weather variables. In the last 30 years, the system has correctly foreshadowed upward or downward trends in the autumn hunting harvest 93 percent of the time.

Cool, damp weather complicates turkey reproductive efforts by making it easier

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for predators to sniff out nest locations and increasing the likelihood that hatchlings will die from exposure.

Last year, after a relatively mild, dry spring, Porter et al predicted the fall turkey population would increase by 39 percent. As it happened, hunters killed 7,183 turkeys last fall, an increase of 75 percent compared to the previous autumn.

Fall turkey hunting and spring turkey hunting are birds of different feathers.

In the spring, hunters lure gobblers into range by mimicking the calls of lonely, lovelorn hens. That tactic seldom works in the fall, when bachelor toms pay little heed to the opposite sex.

Some fall-season hunters try to find turkeys near known feeding areas. Others try to break up flocks, with or without the help of a trained turkey dog, then call the scattered birds back into range by imitating the plaintive cries of a lost pout.

While spring-time hunters are limited to taking full-grown gobblers, immature jakes or the rare bearded hens; turkeys of either sex are fair game in the fall.

The autumn season opens Tuesday in the majority of the state, including all but the northwest corner of Onondaga County, but is closed until Oct. 21 in the bulk of Western New York.

Season-closing dates and bag limits also vary by place, and sportsmen should examine the turkey-season map on page 15 of the 2002-2004 "New York Hunting Regulations Guide" to verify local rules.

One way to pick a good autumn turkey-hunting spot is to review harvest statistics from the previous spring.

In May, 2002, Cattaraugus County hunters topped the rest of the state by bagging 419 birds. The rest of the top ten, in descending order, included Chautauqua County, 402; Erie County, 330; Steuben, 289; Otsego, 278; Delaware, 258; Allegany, 242; Dutchess, 234; St. Lawrence, 227; and Chenango, 214.

## Pheasants Forever banquet, auction is Friday

Time is running short to make reservations for the annual banquet and auction sponsored by the Central New York Chapter of Pheasants Forever, which will be held at 6 p.m. Friday at the Spinning Wheel restaurant banquet facility on Thompson Road North.

For ticket information, call Carmen Davoli at 445-8532. J. Michael Kelly is the outdoors writer for The Post-Standard.

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