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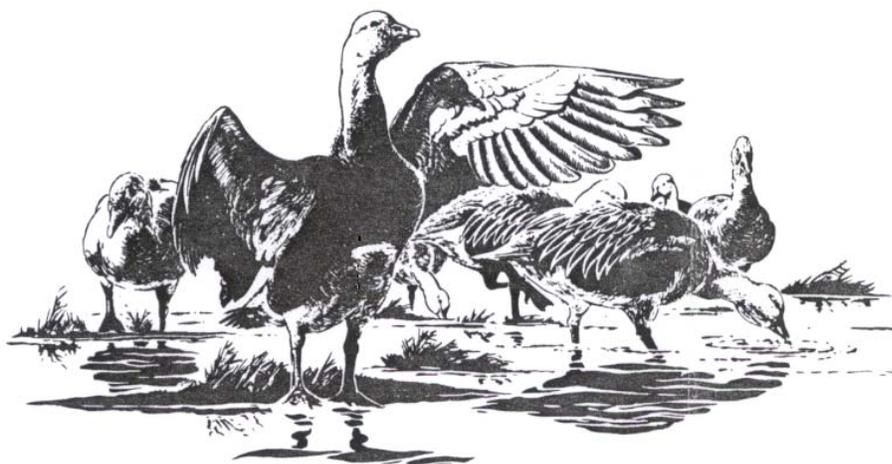
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# 2002 Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action Survey Report



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## **Abstract**

Harvest of light geese during the 2002 Illinois Conservation Action was estimated at 17,875 geese, a decrease of 18,955 geese from the 2001 harvest of 36,830. Participation increased to 5,107 hunters during 2002 compared to 4,665 hunters during 2001. Hunters spent an estimated 31,204 days afield during 2002, a decrease of 1,430 from the 32,634 days hunted during 2001. Unplugged shotguns were the method used most often (67%); however electronic calls and hunting after sunset were also used by more than 50% of hunters (62% and 54%, respectively). As with hunters responding to the 2001 survey, hunters who did not participate in the conservation action reported “no geese in the area” and “no place to hunt” as well as “not interested” as the main reasons they did not hunt light geese.

## **Methods**

A self-administered mail survey of waterfowl hunters took place during June, 2002. Survey participants were selected from the population of Illinois migratory bird hunters registered in the Hunter Information Program (HIP). A total of 1,859 hunters were randomly sampled from the sample frame. Of these, 85 were deleted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses resulting in a usable sample of 1,774 participants. Hunters were mailed a 4-page self-administered survey questionnaire, followed 10 days later with a postcard reminder to nonrespondents. A second questionnaire was mailed to nonrespondents 10 days after the postcard reminder, and was followed in 10 days with a second postcard reminder. Questionnaire items focused on light goose hunting behaviors and harvest during the 2002 Conservation Action.

## **Results**

We received 1,233 (70%) usable questionnaires. Of the responses, 129 (10.5%) hunters reported hunting snow geese during the 2002 Conservation Action. This figure represents essentially the same proportion as that noted for 2001. We estimated a total of 31,204 days hunted by Illinois hunters. Harvest success rate was 13%, producing a

harvest of 17,875 geese, for a mean harvest of 26.92 geese per successful hunter (overall harvest rate was 3.5 geese per hunter). Overall harvest success rate during 2000 was 8.8 geese per hunter, and 7.89 geese per hunter during 2001. (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimates for hunters, days afield, and harvest of light geese 1999-2002 Conservation Action in Illinois.

	1999	2000	2001	2002
Hunters	1,076	865	4,665	5,107
Days Afield	3,756	6,643	32,634	31,204
Harvest	2,254	7,612	36,830	17,875

Electronic calls were used by 62% of hunters (up 11% from 2001) and accounted for a harvest of 5,496 geese. Electronic calls appear to be favored by hunters using unplugged shotguns and hunting one-half hour after sunset. Approximately one-half (54%) of hunters stated they hunted one-half hour after sunset (Table 2). Most geese were harvested using 3 or fewer shotgun shells, whereas 504 geese were harvested by the fourth, fifth or sixth shotgun shells (Table 3). Decoying birds over land was the most frequent method of hunting employed (Table 4), and hunters used rag decoys more than other decoy types (Table 5). A majority of hunters (51%) did not purchase or make snow goose decoys in the year preceding the survey (Table 6). Many hunters (42%) reported the unlimited daily bag limit greatly contributed to their satisfaction with snow goose hunting (Table 7). Less than half (44%) of the hunters either ate or planned to eat the geese they harvested (Table 8).

Most hunters (84%) hunted snow geese during the regular goose season 2000-2001 (Table 9). Of the hunters who hunted during the 2002 Conservation Action, 56% stated they planned to hunt during the 2003 Conservation Action (Table 10). Lack of snow geese in the hunters' area was given as the main reason hunters would not participate in the 2003 Conservation Action (Table 11).

## **Discussion**

Detailed statistical analyses of responses to this survey are difficult due to the low percentage of Illinois hunters who hunted light geese during the Conservation Action. Results indicate that the Conservation Action for light geese is increasing in popularity in Illinois. There was a substantial increase in hunters who participated during spring 2001 from spring 2000, there was another increase in hunters during the 2002 Conservation Action. Hunter success decreased from 7.9 geese per hunter during 2001 to 3.5 geese per hunter during 2002. This decreased harvest rate may be indicative of new hunters entering the sport who have not gained experience in snow goose hunting techniques. The increased number of hunters during 2002 would support this assumption.

In conclusion, the harvest of light geese decreased greatly in Illinois during the 2002 Conservation Action compared to 2001. We estimated hunters in Illinois harvested 17,875 geese during 2002, a decrease of 18,955 geese from the estimated 36,830 geese harvested during the 2001 Illinois Conservation Action. Participation was lower during 2000 than 2001, but during 2002 increased by 9% over the number of hunters who participated during 2001. Whereas average harvest decreased by 51%.

## Snow Goose Tables

Table 2. Methods used to hunt snow geese and harvest using each method, Illinois 2002 Conservation Action.

Method	% Used	Total Hunters	% Successful	Estimated Harvest
Electronic calls	62	3,166	38	5,496
Unplugged shotgun	67	3,417	45	7,435
Hunting after sunset	54	2,758	30	5,885

Table 3. Geese harvested using unplugged shotguns.

Shell	Estimated Hunters	Percent	Estimated Harvest
4 <sup>th</sup> Shell	263	48	2,017
5 <sup>th</sup> Shell	170	31	1,030
6 <sup>th</sup> Shell	71	13	295

Table 4. Frequency of use for light goose hunting techniques during 2002 Illinois Conservation Action.

Technique	n	Often	Rarely	Never
Decoying over land	115	82%	9%	9%
Pass shooting	109	46%	20%	34%
Sneaking/creeping	102	33%	23%	44%
Decoying over water	102	26%	18%	56%

Table 5. Types of decoys use to hunt light geese during 2002 Illinois Conservation Action. (n=129)

Decoy type	Number of Respondents	Percent of Total Snow Goose Hunters <sup>a</sup>	Total Number of Decoys Used
Rag	81	63%	16,050
Shells	72	56%	4,329
Silhouette	57	44%	3,566
Wind socks/kites	56	43%	5,246
Mechanical	12	9%	21
Did not use decoys	20	16%	0

<sup>a</sup>Percentages add up to >100% because some hunters used more than one type of decoy.

Table 6. Percent Illinois hunters who made or purchased snow goose decoys during 2002. (n=126)

Make or Purchase	Percent Response
Yes	49%
No	51%

Table 7. Contributions of unlimited bag limit to satisfaction in snow goose hunting among participants in Illinois 2002 Conservation Action. (n=125)

	Percent Response
Greatly Contributed	42%
Somewhat Contributed	26%
Did not contribute	32%

Table 8. Use of birds harvested during 2002 Illinois Conservation Action.

Use	Number of Respondents
Ate them or plan to eat them	44
Ate some, gave some away	36
Gave them away	13
Other <sup>a</sup>	5

Table 9. Hunter participation in snow goose hunting during past seasons in Illinois.

Season	Percent of Hunters in 2002 Conservation Action
Spring 2001 conservation order season	84
Spring 2000 conservation order season	67
1999-00 regular goose season	46
1998-99 regular goose season	39

Table 10. Hunters who planned to hunt snow geese during 2003 Illinois Conservation Action. (n=1103)

	Percent Response
Yes	56%
No	44%

Table 11. Reasons for not planning to hunt during the 2003 Illinois Conservation Action.

Reason	Percent Respondents
No snow geese in my area	13
No place to hunt	9
Not interested/other interests	9
Not enough time	4
Do not have proper equipment	3
Do not know any other hunters who hunt snow geese	2
Not enough knowledge	1
Costs too much for equipment	<1
Decoy poorly/hard to hunt	<1
Do not like the taste	<1
Moved out of state	<1
Health reasons/age	<1