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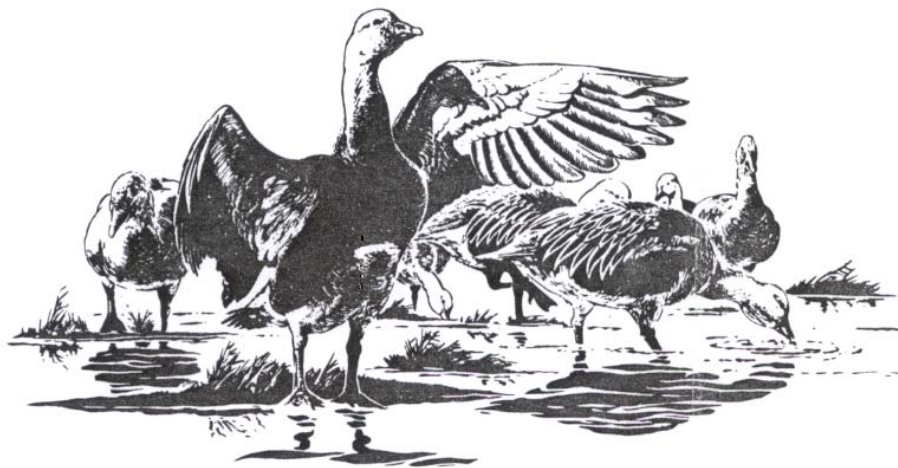
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2003 Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action Survey Report



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Results of the 2003
Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action
Hunter Survey

Final Report

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Abstract

Harvest of light geese during the 2003 Illinois Conservation Action was estimated at 30,564 geese, an increase of 12,689 (71%) from the 2002 harvest of 17,875. Participation decreased to 3,111 hunters during 2003 compared to 5,107 hunters during 2002. Hunters spent an estimated 27,177 days afield during 2003, a decrease of 4,027 from the 31,204 days hunted during 2002. Unplugged shotguns were the method used most often (72%); however hunting after sunset and electronic calls were also used by more than 50% of hunters (65% and 63%, respectively). As with hunters responding to the 2002 survey, hunters who did not participate in the conservation action reported “no geese in the area” and “no place to hunt” as well as “did not have the proper equipment” as the main reasons they did not hunt light geese.

Methods

A self-administered mail survey of waterfowl hunters took place during June, 2003. Survey participants were selected from the population of Illinois migratory bird hunters registered in the Hunter Information Program (HIP). A total of 1,826 hunters were randomly sampled from the sample frame. Of these, 71 were deleted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses resulting in a usable sample of 1,755 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 2003 Conservation Action.

Results

We received 1,165 (66%) usable questionnaires. Of the responses, 87 (7.5%) hunters reported hunting snow geese during the 2003 Conservation Action. This response shows a decrease of 4% from the 2002 survey. The largest reason for not hunting the Conservation Action season was “no snow geese in my area” (43%), followed by “no place to hunt snow geese” and “did not have the proper equipment” (40% and 28% respectively).

We estimated a total of 27,177 days hunted by Illinois hunters. Harvest success rate was 67%, producing a harvest of 30,564 geese, for a mean harvest of 14.83 geese per successful hunter (overall harvest rate was 9.8 geese per hunter). Overall harvest success rate during 2001 was 7.89 geese per hunter and 3.5 geese per hunter during 2002 (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimates for hunters, days afield, and harvest of light geese 1999-2003 Conservation Action in Illinois.

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Hunters	1,076	865	4,665	5,107	3,111
Days Afield	3,756	6,643	32,634	31,204	27,177
Harvest	2,254	7,612	36,830	17,875	30,564

Clinton, Fayette, Jefferson, and Montgomery counties were reported hunted most, accounting for 32% of the respondents. Harvest from these four counties produced an estimated 12,388 geese, 41% of the statewide harvest.

A large proportion of hunters stated they hunted one-half hour after sunset (59%) and use electronic calls (57%) (Table 2). Of the conservation actions unplugged shotguns were used most by hunters (66%). It is estimated that 7,060 geese were harvested by the fourth, fifth or sixth shotgun shells (Table 3) accounting for approximately 23% of the

harvest. Therefore, most geese were taken using three or fewer shells. Decoying birds over land was the most frequent method of hunting employed (Table 4), and more hunters used shell decoys, however rag decoys far outnumber shell decoys in most spreads (Table 5). A majority of hunters (52%) purchased or made snow goose decoys in the year preceding the survey (Table 6). Many hunters (48%) reported the unlimited daily bag limit greatly contributed to their satisfaction with snow goose hunting (Table 7). Only 29% of the hunters either ate or planned to eat the geese they harvested (Table 8).

Most hunters (37%) hunted snow geese during the regular goose season 2002-2003 (Table 9). Of the hunters who hunted during the 2003 Conservation Action, 97% stated they planned to hunt during the 2004 Conservation Action, furthermore 45% of all respondents claimed they would hunt snow geese during the 2004 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 number of hunters had less participation in 2003 than 2004, but had a much greater harvest. It appears that those hunters who either harvest no or very few geese, or spend little or no time hunting are likely not to hunt the following year. It can be predicted that there will be an increase in hunters during the 2004 Conservation Action season due to the increased success in 2003. This is also indicated by the higher recruitment (45% of all respondents) and retention (97% of respondents who hunted 2003 Conservation Action season) that are planning to hunt during the 2004 Conservation Action season. Hunter satisfaction appears to be due to the liberal Conservation Action regulations. From 2002 to 2003 there was a 6% increase in satisfaction due to increased bag limits, likely due to fewer hunters that harvested more geese. Hunter success increased from 3.5 geese per hunter during 2002 to 9.8 geese per hunter during 2003. This increased harvest rate may be indicative of retained hunters having gained experience in snow goose hunting techniques and becoming more specialized.

In conclusion, the harvest of light geese increased greatly in Illinois during the 2003 Conservation Action compared to 2002. We estimated hunters in Illinois harvested 30,564 geese during 2003, an increase of 12,689 geese (71%) from the estimated 17,875 geese harvested during the 2001 Illinois Conservation Action.

Snow Goose Tables

Table 2. Methods used to hunt snow geese and harvest using each method, Illinois 2003 Conservation Action.

Method	% Used	Total Hunters	% Successful	Estimated Harvest
Electronic calls	57%	1,788	46%	17,211
Unplugged shotgun	66	2,038	64	19,009
Hunting after sunset	59	1,824	43	8,964

Table 3. Geese harvested using unplugged shotguns.

Shell	Estimated Hunters	Percent	Estimated Harvest
4 th Shell	1,287	61%	3,771
5 th Shell	751	36	1,820
6 th Shell	608	29	1,469

Table 4. Frequency of use for light goose hunting techniques during 2003 Illinois Conservation Action.

Technique	n	Often	Rarely	Never
Decoying over land	80	70%	21%	9%
Pass shooting	81	46%	22%	32%
Sneaking/creeping	74	35%	26%	39%
Decoying over water	73	30%	19%	51%

Table 5. Types of decoys use to hunt light geese during 2003 Illinois Conservation Action. (n=87)

Decoy type	Number of Respondents	Percent of Total Snow Goose Hunters ^a	Total Number of Decoys Used
Rag	56	64%	19,470
Shells	58	67%	4,087
Silhouette	46	53%	5,377
Wind socks/kites	47	54%	3,337
Mechanical	8	9%	21
Did not use decoys	14	16%	0

^aPercentages 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 2003. (n=87)

Make or Purchase	Percent Response
Yes	52%
No	48%

Table 7. Contributions of unlimited bag limit to satisfaction in snow goose hunting among participants in Illinois 2003 Conservation Action. (n=87)

	Percent Response
Greatly Contributed	48%
Somewhat Contributed	15%
Did not contribute	37%

Table 8. Use of birds harvested during 2003 Illinois Conservation Action.

Use	Number of Respondents
Ate them or plan to eat them	29
Ate some, gave some away	20
Gave them away	13
Other ^a	4

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

Season	Percent of Hunters in 2003 Conservation Action
Spring 2002 conservation order season	77
Spring 2001 conservation order season	63
Spring 2000 conservation order season	37
1999-00 regular goose season	26
1998-99 regular goose season	23

Table 10. Hunters who planned to hunt snow geese during 2004 Illinois Conservation Action. (n=1165)

	Percent Response
Yes	45%
No	55

Table 11. Reasons for not planning to hunt during the 2004 Illinois Conservation Action.

Reason	Percent Respondents
No snow geese in my area	28%
No place to hunt	25
Not interested/other interests	18
Not enough time	12
Do not have proper equipment	7
Do not know any other hunters who hunt snow geese	4
Not enough knowledge	3
Decoy poorly/hard to hunt	1
Out of area during season	1
Do not like the taste	<1
Health reasons/age	<1
Lost gun privileges	<1