

Results of the 2000 Survey of Hunters
Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action

Final Report

Craig A. Miller
Human Dimensions Specialist
Illinois Natural History Survey
Champaign, IL

Abstract

Harvest of light geese during the 2000 conservation action was estimated at 7,612 geese, an increase over the 1999 harvest of 2,254. Fewer hunters were estimated to participate during 2000 (865) compared to 1999 (1,076). Hunters spent an estimated 6,643 days afield during 2000, an increase from 3,756 during 1999. Hunting ½ hour after sunset was the method used most often, whereas hunters using unplugged shotguns harvested more geese. Hunters who did not participate in the conservation action reported “no place to hunt” and “no geese in the area” as the reasons they did not hunt light geese.

Methods

A self-administered mail survey of waterfowl hunters took place during May, 2000. Survey participants were selected from 62,208 Illinois waterfowl hunters registered in the Hunter Information Program (HIP). A total of 1,890 hunters were randomly sampled from the sample frame, well within the 95% confidence interval with +3% sampling error. Of the total, 194 hunters were deleted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses resulting in a usable sample of 1,696 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 2000 conservation action. Data were analyzed using SPSS 10.0.

Nonresponse bias usually becomes a concern once response fall below 50%. Harvest estimates are a special case, however, and bias may occur with higher response rates. Telephone follow-up surveys of nonrespondents to the 1999-2000 Illinois Waterfowl Hunter Survey found no difference in harvest or participation between respondents and nonrespondents (C. Miller, unpublished data). Given the relatively high response to the 2000 survey for the light goose conservation action and the low rate of hunter participation, we determined nonresponse was likely due to nonparticipation.

Results

We received 1,130 (67%) usable questionnaires. Of the responses, 25 (2.21%) hunters reported hunting snow geese during the 2000 conservation action. Hunters stated they hunted 192 days and harvested 220 geese, for a mean total harvest of 8.8 geese per hunter. Inferring these percentages onto the population of waterfowl hunters, we estimated 865 light goose hunters hunted 6,643 days and harvested 7,612 geese in Illinois during the conservation action (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimates for hunters, days afield, and harvest of light geese during 2000 conservation action in Illinois.

	Reported from Survey	Statewide Estimate
Hunters	25	865
Days	28	6,643
Harvest	220	7,612

Most geese were harvested using 3 or fewer shotgun shells. Although 40% of hunters reported hunting with unplugged shotguns, only 10 geese were harvested by the fourth, fifth or sixth shotgun shells. Electronic calls were used by 32% of hunters and accounted for a harvest of 67 geese. Electronic calls appear to be favored by hunters using unplugged shotguns and were not used in combination with hunting one-half hour after sunset. Approximately one-third (32%) of hunters stated they hunted one-half hour after sunset (Table 2).

Table 2. Methods used by Illinois hunters during 2000 conservation action.

Method	% Hunters	% Harvest ¹
Calls	8	4
Unplugged Shotguns	8	28
½ Hour after Sunset	20	2
Combined Methods		
Calls + Unplugged Shotguns	16	11
Calls + ½ Hour after Sunset	0	0
Unplugged Shotguns + ½ Hour after Sunset	4	27
All 3 methods	8	23
Methods Unknown	8	6

¹total more than 100% due to rounding

The most frequent reason for not hunting light geese was lack of place to hunt (42%), followed by no light geese in their area (39%), and lacking proper equipment (35%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Reasons Illinois waterfowl hunters did not participate in 2000 conservation action.

Reason	Percent
No place to hunt	42
No geese in area	39
Did not have proper equipment	35
No interest	28
Did not know others who hunted	28
Not enough knowledge of goose habits	26
Not enough time	22

Discussion

Detailed analysis 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 fewer hunters participated during spring 2000 than spring 1999, when 7% of Illinois waterfowl hunters reported hunting light geese during the conservation action. Hunter success increased to 8.8 geese per hunter during 2000 from 2.1 geese per hunter during 1999. The most frequent reason for not hunting during 1999 was “Not enough time”. Hunters responding to the 2000 survey offered that reason as the least often.

In conclusion, the harvest of light geese increased in Illinois during the 2000 conservation action. We estimated hunters harvested 2,254 geese during 1999, compared to an estimated 7,612 geese for the 2000 conservation action. One area of concern may be decreased participation. Comments seem to indicate hunters were frustrated at the spotty distribution of the geese, and this frustration may be leading to lower participation. No definitive trend can be made using two years of data. We will continue to monitor hunter participation closely over the life of the conservation action.