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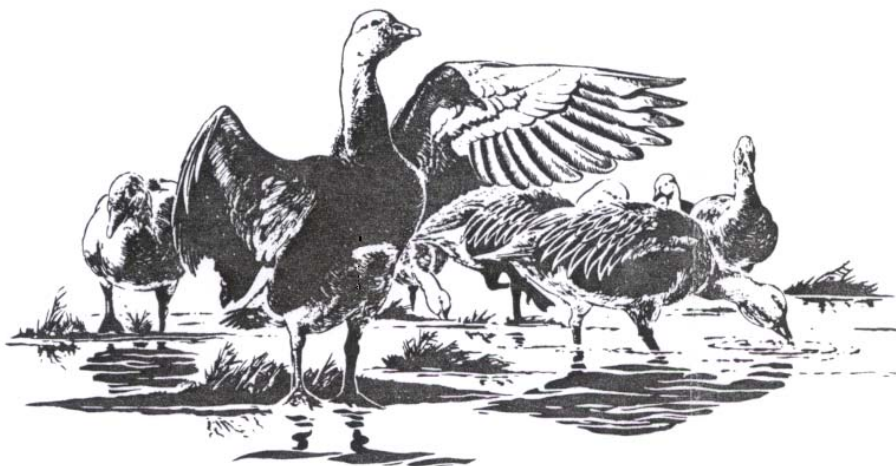
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2001 Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action Survey Report



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Results of the 2001 Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action Hunter Survey

JOB COMPLETION REPORT

WILDLIFE HARVEST AND

HUMAN DIMENSIONS RESEARCH PROGRAM

STATE OF ILLINOIS

**PROJECT NUMBER: W-112-R-10
STUDY 101
JOB NO. 101.3**

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**Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration
W-112-R-10**

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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Results of the 2001
Illinois Light Goose Conservation Action
Hunter Survey

Final Report

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Abstract

Harvest of light geese during the 2001 conservation action was estimated at 36,830 geese, an increase over the 2000 harvest of 7,612. Participation increased to 4,665 hunters during 2001 compared to 865 hunters during 2000. Hunters spent an estimated 32,634 days afield during 2001, an increase of 4.9 times over the 6,643 days hunted during 2000. Hunting ½ hour after sunset was the method used most often (63%); however unplugged shotguns and electronic calls were also used by approximately 50% of hunters (48% and 51%, respectively). As with hunters responding to the 2000 survey, hunters who did not participate in the conservation action reported “no geese in the area” and “no place to hunt” as the two main reasons they did not hunt light geese.

Methods

A self-administered mail survey of waterfowl hunters took place during June, 2001. Survey participants were selected from 46,658 Illinois waterfowl hunters registered in the Hunter Information Program (HIP). A total of 1,000 hunters were randomly sampled from the sample frame. Of these, 43 were deleted due to incorrect or undeliverable addresses resulting in a usable sample of 957 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 2001 Conservation Action.

Results

We received 632 (66%) usable questionnaires. Of the responses, 70 (11%) hunters reported hunting snow geese during the 2001 Conservation Action. This figure represents a substantial increase over the 2.21% participation rate noted for 2000. We estimated a total of 32,634 days hunted and a harvest of 36,830 geese, for a mean harvest of 7.9 geese per hunter (15.79 geese per successful hunter). Harvest rates during 2000 were 8.8 geese per hunter. (Table 1).

Table 1. Estimates for hunters, days afield, and harvest of light geese 1999-2001 Conservation Action in Illinois.

	1999	2000	2001
Hunters	1,076	865	4,665
Days	3,756	6,643	32,634
Harvest	2,254	7,612	36,830

Electronic calls were used by 51% of hunters and accounted for a harvest of 612 geese. Electronic calls appear to be favored by hunters using unplugged shotguns and hunting one-half hour after sunset. Approximately two-thirds (63%) of hunters stated they hunted one-half hour after sunset (Table 2). Most geese were harvested using 3 or fewer shotgun shells, whereas 204 geese were harvested by the fourth, fifth or sixth shotgun shells (Table 4). Decoying birds over land was the most frequent method of hunting employed (Table 5), and hunters used rag decoys more than other decoy types (Table 6). Most hunters (67%) purchased or made snow goose decoys in the year preceding the survey (Table 7). Many hunters (42%) reported the unlimited daily bag limit greatly contributed to their satisfaction with snow goose hunting (Table 8). A majority of hunters (53%) either ate or planned to eat the geese they harvested (Table 9).

Most hunters (60%) hunted snow geese during the regular goose season 1999-2000 (Table 10). Of the hunters who hunted during the 2001 Conservation Action, 96% stated they planned to hunt during the 2002 Conservation Action (Table 11). Lack of snow geese in the hunters' area was given as the main reason hunters would not participate in the 2002 Conservation Action (Table 12).

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. Although fewer hunters participated during spring 2000 than spring 1999, there was a substantial increase in hunters during the 2001 Conservation Action. Hunter success decreased from 8.8 geese per hunter during 2000 to 7.9 geese per hunter during 2001. 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 2001 would support this assumption.

In conclusion, the harvest of light geese increased greatly in Illinois during the 2001 Conservation Action compared to 2000. We estimated hunters harvested 36,830 geese during 2001, an increase of 29,218 geese over the estimated 7,612 geese harvested during the 2000 Conservation Action. No definitive trend can be made using the three years of data for Illinois. Participation was higher during 1999 than 2000, but during 2001 increased 5.4 times the number of hunters who participated during 2000. Average harvest increased as well. We will continue to monitor hunter participation closely over the life of the Conservation Action.

Snow Goose Tables

Table 2. Please indicate which of the following methods you used to hunt snow geese and your harvest using each method.

Method	Used	Total Hunters	Reported Harvest
Electronic call n=59	51%	2379	612
Unplugged shotgun n=56	48%	2239	600
Hunting after sunset n=54	63%	2939	568

Table 3. Combined methods of snow goose harvest in Illinois, 2001 Conservation Action

	Number of hunters	Percent
Electronic calls	2379	51
Unplugged shotguns	2239	48
Hunting ½ hour after sunset	2939	63
Electronic calls and unplugged shotguns	1689	36
Electronic calls and hunting ½ hour after sunset	1737	37
Unplugged shotguns and hunting ½ hour after sunset	1272	27
Electronic calls, unplugged shotguns, and hunting ½ hour after sunset	1301	28

Table 4. If you used an unplugged shotgun, how many geese did you harvest using the:

Shell	Harvest
4 th Shell n=10	126
5 th Shell n=8	63
6 th Shell n=4	15

Table 5. How often did you use the following techniques when hunting snow geese?

Technique	Often	Rarely	Never
Decoying over land n=62	71%	18%	11%
Pass shooting n=50	44%	30%	26%
Sneaking/creeping n=50	56%	18%	26%
Decoying over water n=46	24%	22%	54%

Table 6. How many of the following types of decoys did you use to hunt snow geese?
N=70

Decoy type	Percent
Rag	60
Silhouette	49
Shells	47
Wind socks/kites	46
Mechanical	6
Did not use decoys	19

Table 7. Did you make or purchase snow goose decoys in the past year?
N=70

Yes	67%
No	33%

Table 8. How did the unlimited bag limit contribute to satisfaction with snow goose hunting?

N=69

Greatly	Somewhat	Not at all
42%	17%	41%

Table 9. How did you use the birds you harvested?
N=43

Use	n	Percent
Ate them or plan to eat them	23	53
Ate some, gave some away	13	30
Gave them away	6	14
Other	1	2

Table 10. Which of the following past seasons did you hunt snow geese in Illinois?
N=70

Season	Percent
Fall-winter 99	60
Spring 99	53
1998-99	37
1997-98	26
1996-97	21
Before 1996-97	16

Table 11. Hunters who planned to hunt snow geese during 2000-01 Conservation Action

Yes	96%
No	4%

Table 12. If you are not planning to hunt the conservation season next year, why not?
N=248

Reason	n	Percent
No snow geese in my area	80	32
No place to hunt	40	16
Not interested	30	12
No time	26	10
Don't have proper equipment	12	5
Don't know anyone to hunt with	7	3
Taste bad	6	2
Hard to hunt	4	2
Health/age	3	1
Don't know	2	1
Hunt in other states	2	1
Too many regulations	1	<1
Hunting is no good	1	<1
Not aware of conservation season	1	<1