

Avid Quail Hunter Survey 2011-2012 season:

During the 2011-2012 quail season, 41 cooperating quail hunters reported the results of 445 hunts – the lowest number of hunters and hunts ever reported. This year we enacted a new survey protocol which may explain some of the decline. As the new protocol becomes established we hope to recruit more survey participants. An average quail hunt lasted 3.39 hours. Hunters found a total of 590 quail coveys and averaged finding 1.3 coveys per hunt. Hunters averaged killing 0.41 quail per hour hunted statewide, harvesting a total of 620. The bulk of all quail hunting occurs in the Tidewater and East Piedmont physiographic regions (212 hunts and 164 hunts, respectively). Hunters averaged finding 0.39 coveys per party hour statewide, meaning it takes about 2 hours and 56 minutes to find a single covey of quail on average. Comparatively, hunters in the Tidewater region found 338 coveys and averaged finding 0.46 coveys per hour. It takes an average of 2 hours and 17 minutes to find a covey in the Tidewater region. In the East Piedmont region, hunters found 196 coveys, and averaged 0.32 per hour (3 hours and 12 minutes per covey). In the West Piedmont region hunters found 39 coveys and averaged 0.29 per hour (3 hours and 44 minutes per covey). Hunts reported in the Northern, Southwest Mountain and Central Mountain regions were too few to analyze. For the first time this past season we asked for habitat information on where coveys were found. Of the 590 coveys found, 318 (58%) were found in cut-overs (recently harvested timbered tracts, mostly replanted with pines and in the East Piedmont or Tidewater regions), 70 (13%) were found in field borders or along field edges, 62 (11%) were found in crop fields and 36 (7%) were found in open pine stands (burned and un-burned). These findings emphasize the importance of cut-overs to early succession species like quail, and should also serve notice that declines in the quantity and quality of cut-overs in the future could prove fatal for remaining quail populations.