

## **Fort Liberty Turkey Scouting and Hunting Check In Time is 0400. Check Out Time is 1200.**

Why did Fort Liberty Wildlife Branch change the turkey scouting and hunting hours?

1. The turkey population throughout the southeast is in decline, and Fort Liberty's is no exception. We have experienced very low recruitment (poults entering the population) for the last 4 years. Many wildlife research experts are currently investigating the possible causes of this decline. Initial findings from several studies point to two primary factors; habitat loss/ degradation, and human disturbance. On Fort Liberty human disturbance is likely a significant problem. Once the Global War on Terror deployments ended, military training on the installation has intensified greatly, as has urban encroachment around the installation. Unlike deer and other game species, wild turkeys, especially during the breeding season, are highly sensitive to frequent human disturbance. Many states require turkey hunters to cease hunting at noon to allow turkeys to engage in breeding activity for the remainder of the day. We believe it makes sense to do the same on Fort Liberty. The more hens that are bred and set clutches, the more poults we have on the ground that may enter the population. Our wild turkey population is a precious resource, and anything we can do to foster their preservation and increase for future generations is desirable, and quite frankly our responsibility.
2. Hunter harvest data collected from 2006 (post-wide turkey hunting began) to 2015 (pre-iSportsman) clearly show that more than 90% of all turkeys checked in were killed before 1200 (noon). Since 2016 (first season using iSportsman) the data show that 83% of the birds were killed before 1200 (noon). When the 2020 (COVID) season is excluded and hunters were not required to check in their birds at the Wildlife Branch office, this percentage increases to 87%. During the 2020 season, turkey hunting trips and harvest more than doubled compared to all but one previous and one subsequent turkey hunting season. Many well-respected turkey biologists and wildlife professors believe that the eastern wild turkey population may still be recovering from the over harvest of mature, dominant toms (they perform the bulk of the breeding) during the 2020 "COVID season."
3. For more information, or if you have questions contact Jeff Jones, turkey program manager, at 910-908-4781 or [jeffrey.g.jones3.civ@army.mil](mailto:jeffrey.g.jones3.civ@army.mil). You may also send inquiries to our gmail account at [fbisportsman@gmail.com](mailto:fbisportsman@gmail.com).