



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 21 - 24, 2020



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The late January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of January 21-24, 2020. Due to near-record rainfall for the month of January in some areas, wetland habitat availability remained well above the levels typically observed for this time of year in the Mississippi Delta. Flooded habitat was readily available in most regions of the Mississippi Delta, especially in the Yazoo backwater area in the South Delta and lands between the Mississippi River levees. The high water in the Mississippi River is still providing significant waterfowl habitat and hunting opportunities. Most drainages, creeks, and rivers in the interior Delta have high water levels and “natural” over-bank flooding was observed in many areas due to frequent rainfall. As a result, observations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta were more evenly distributed across the landscape than previous surveys.

Continuing this season’s trend, duck abundance estimates increased again, reaching peak levels for the season. Estimates were similar to several recent years’ late January estimates in the Mississippi Delta region, and were much higher than last year’s survey for this time period (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabblers, and total ducks were higher than their long-term averages for the late January period, while diving ducks were below the long-term average (Table 2). Mallards and other dabbling ducks increased substantially since the early January survey. Dabbling ducks other than mallards again comprised about 60% of all duck observations, which is typical for the Mississippi Delta. Mallards were the most abundant duck species observed overall, followed by gadwall and green-winged teal. Scaup and ruddy ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively.

Last week’s return of more seasonable winter weather, with north winds and below-freezing temperatures, created suitable conditions for large migration events from northern latitudes. As a result, waterfowl abundances increased across much of the Mississippi Delta and reached peak numbers heading into the final weekend of the waterfowl hunting season. However, newly arriving birds were welcomed by widespread wetland habitat in the forms of both intensively managed impoundments and over-bank natural flooding along creeks and rivers. This abundant habitat allowed birds to distribute across the Delta and may have impacted hunting success in some areas.

The northeastern region of the Delta again held the greatest abundances of mallards, other dabblers, and total ducks, but ducks were more evenly distributed among all regions than in past surveys. The southeastern region held the greatest abundances of diving ducks. As usual, mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed primarily using flooded agricultural fields, followed by moist-soil wetlands with natural vegetation. However, a high number of duck observations, particularly mallards, in forested wetlands were also noted. Most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes, but since many fields and other low-lying areas have continued holding deeper water than usual, this may have had caused a dispersal of diving ducks across the landscape. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where large complexes of diverse wetland habitats were available.

Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’ geese) were observed during the late January survey. Light geese were especially abundant again in the northern half of the Delta. However, geese have continued to become more widely distributed as the winter moves along.

Large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were again observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

The remainder of the regular duck and goose hunting seasons for Mississippi will continue through January 31, 2020. The regular season will be followed by light goose conservation order opportunities February 1 - February 7 and February 9 - March 31, as well as a youth, veteran, and military waterfowl hunting day on February 8. For weekly waterfowl reports and more information on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey periods, 2008-2020.

Year	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2007-08	110,476	182,869	70,396	363,741
2008-09	262,235	318,638	232,878	740,591
2009-10	234,937	333,240	112,167	680,344
2010-11	247,913	454,578	215,821	918,313
2011-12	278,205	436,996	199,926	915,127
2012-13	146,782	273,905	83,119	503,806
2013-14	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-15	162,098	356,993	82,733	596,092
2015-16	307,177	482,843	206,983	997,003
2016-17	267,078	483,037	106,419	815,903
2017-18	334,140	516,240	45,587	895,968
2018-19	151,742	309,696	74,525	532,413
2019-20	252,276	507,754	106,770	839,005
Average	229,588	388,066	128,110	733,192

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the five most recent late January survey periods.

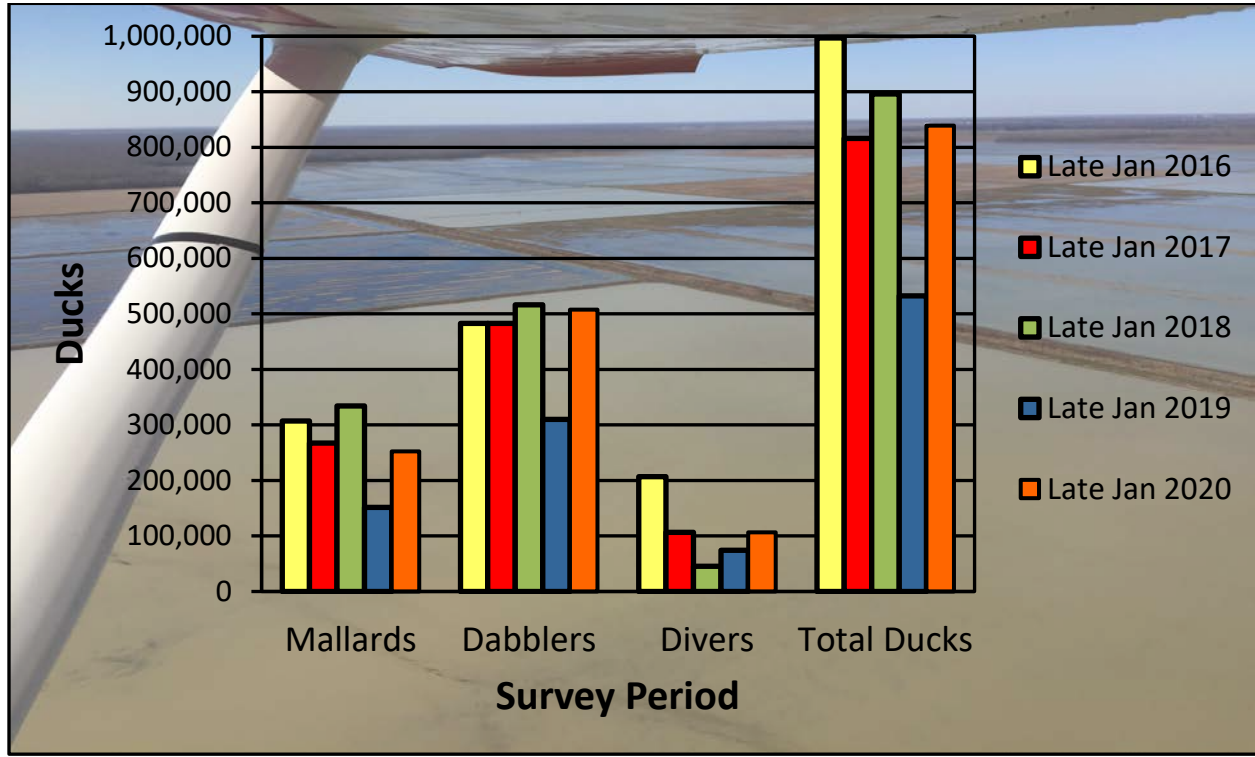
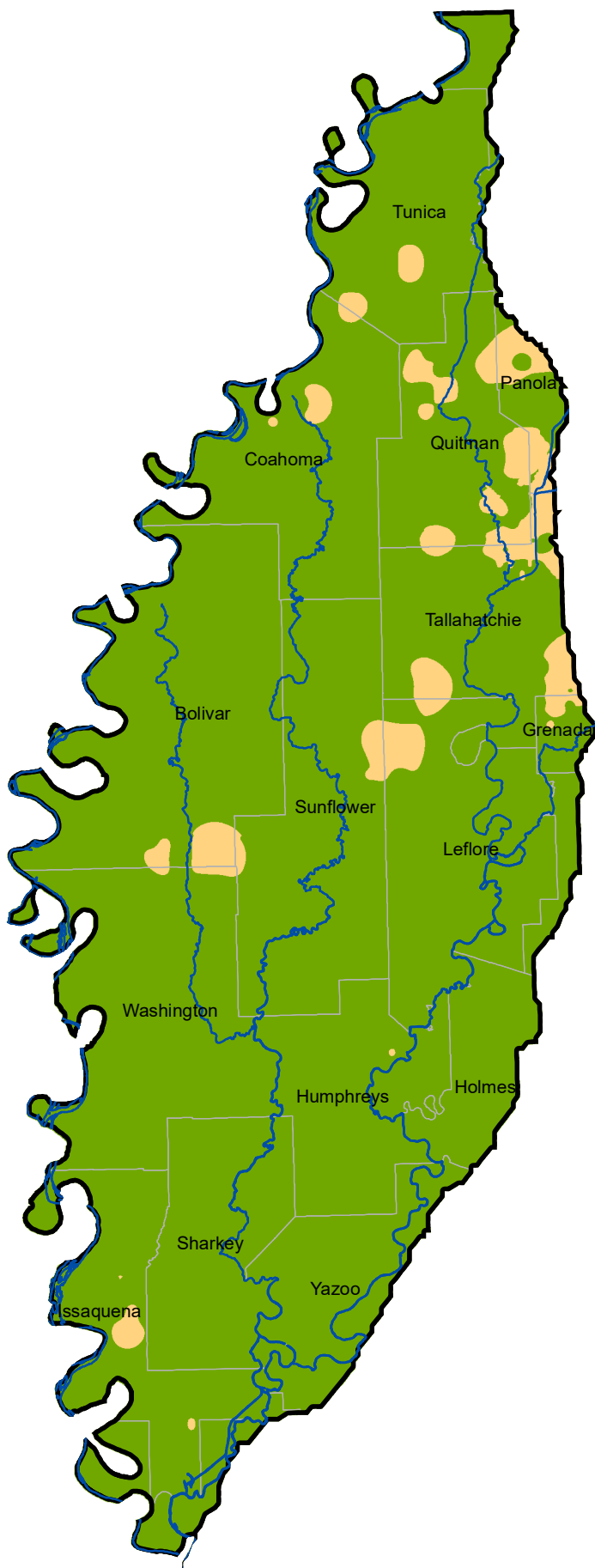


Table 2. Comparison of late January 2020 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for late January survey estimates.

Species Group	Late January 2020	Late January LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	252,276	229,588	+9.9%
Other Dabblers	507,754	388,066	+30.8%
Diving Ducks	106,770	128,110	-16.7%
Total Ducks	839,005	733,192	+14.4%

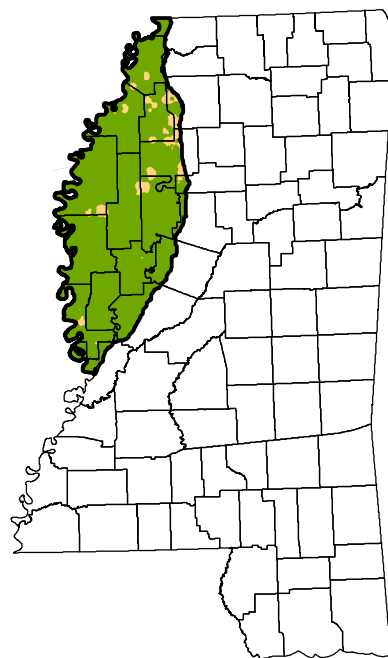
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 21 - 24, 2020



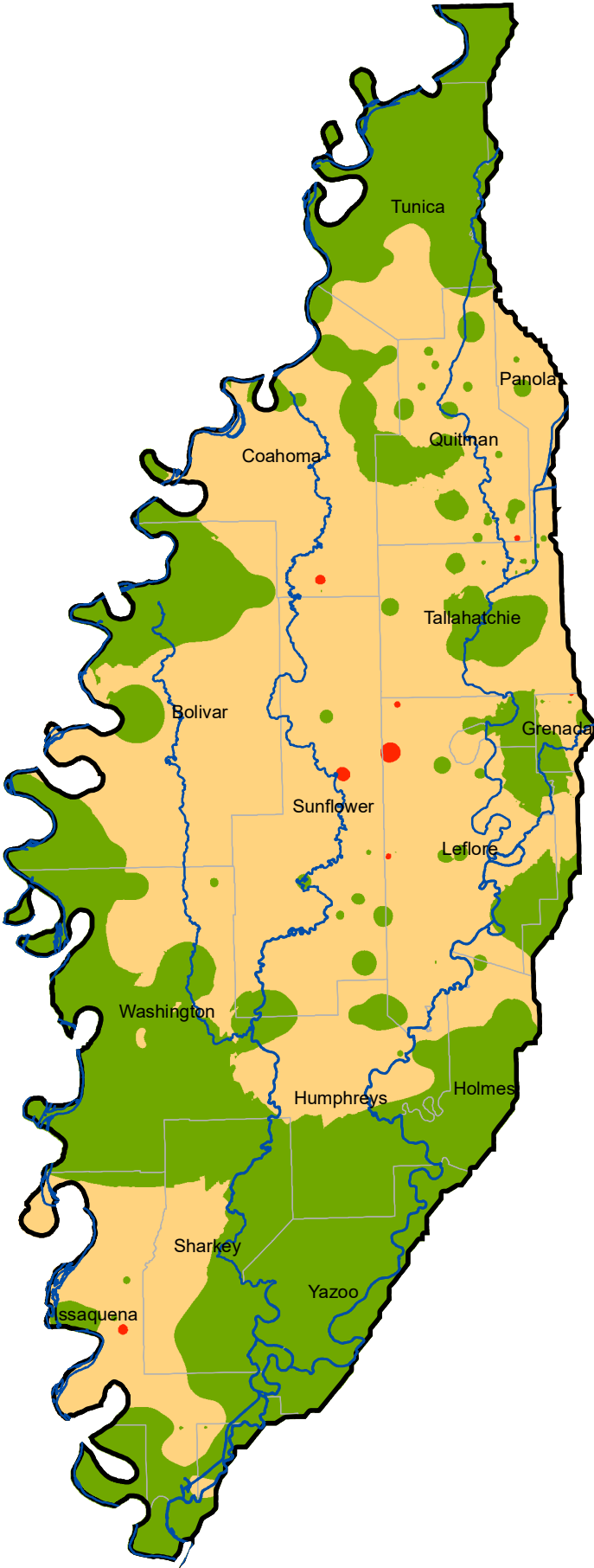
Description

- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



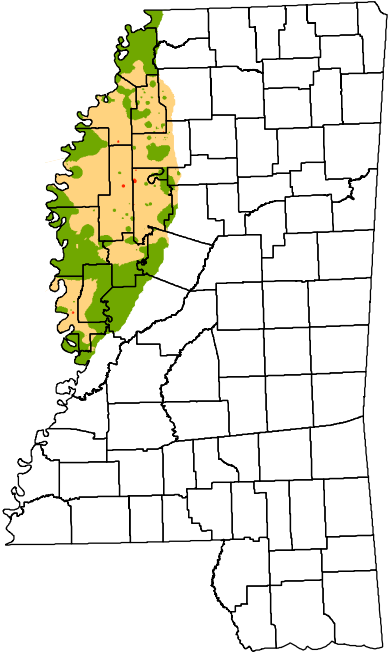
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Jan. 21 - 24, 2020



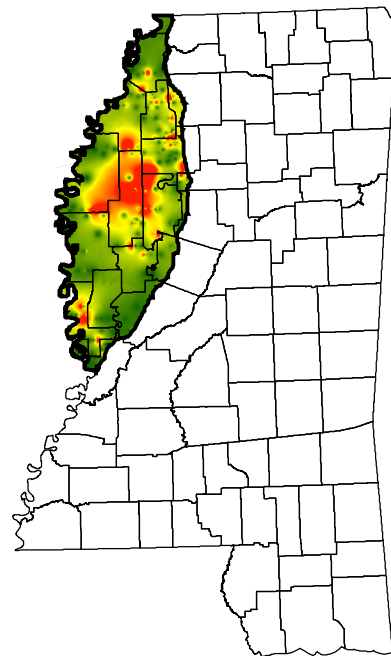
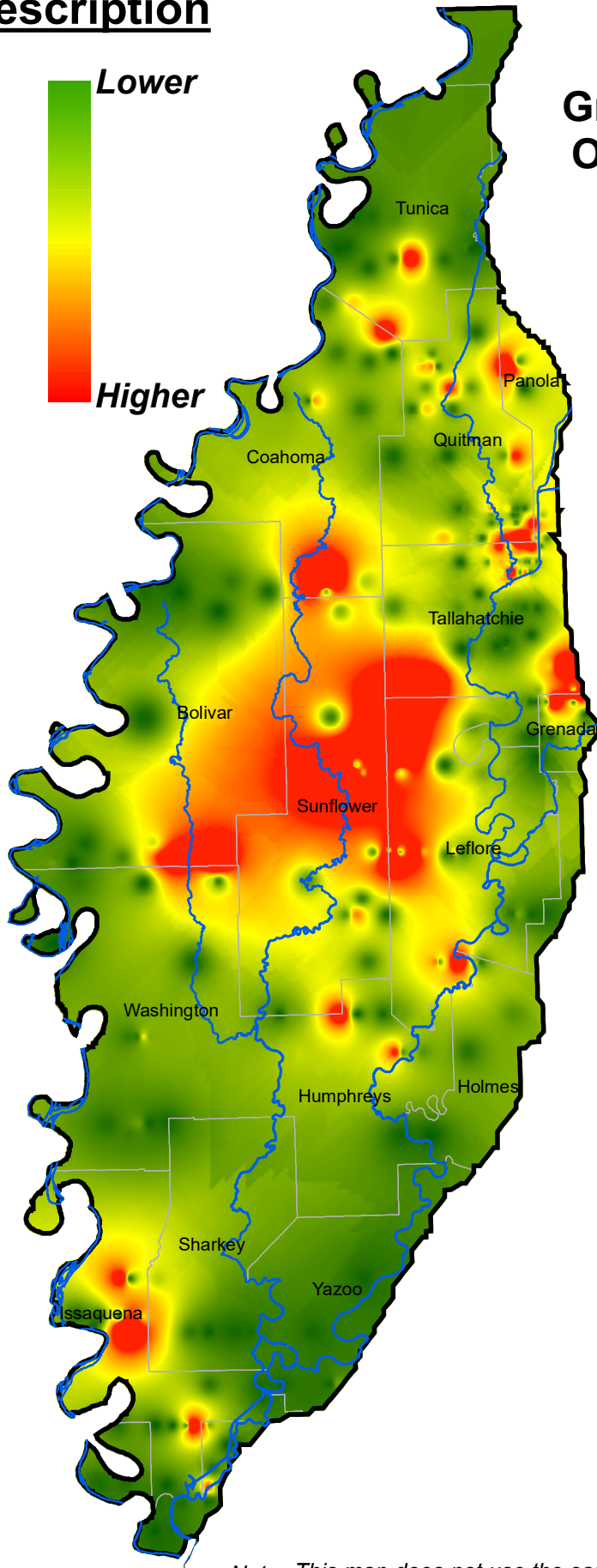
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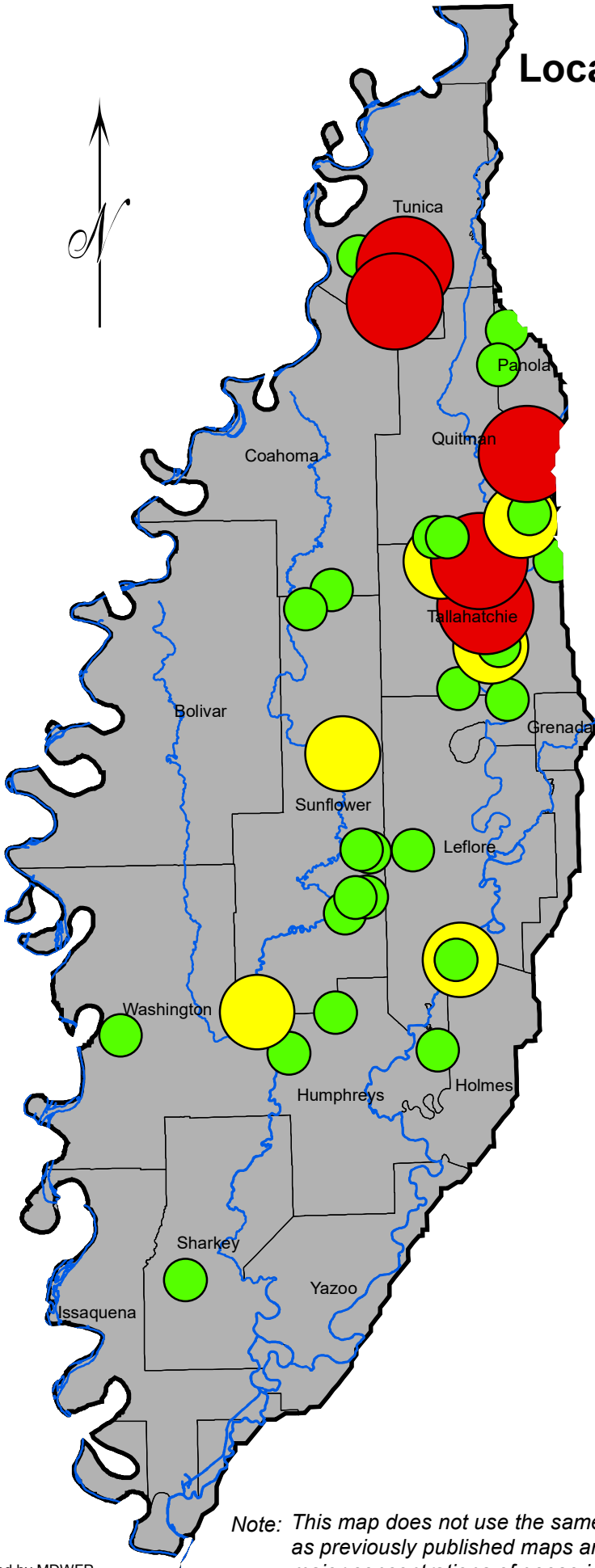
Description

Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 21 - 24, 2020

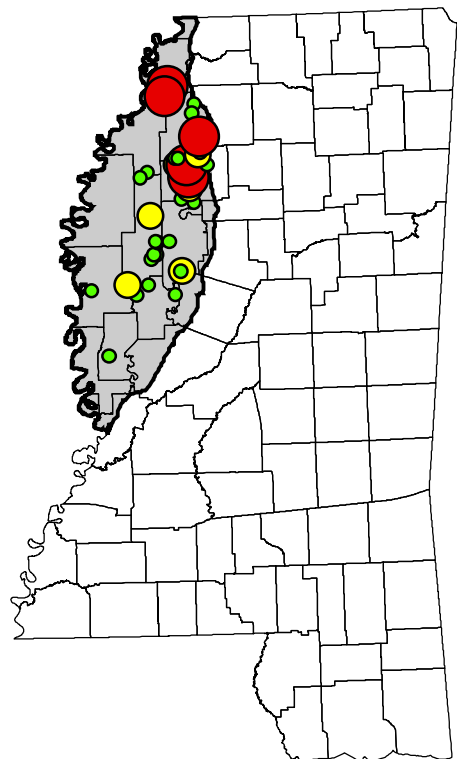
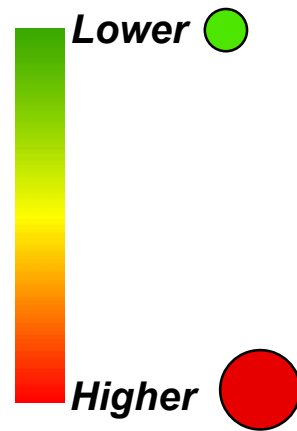


Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.

Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 21 - 24, 2020



Description



Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of geese in the Mississippi Delta.