

## **2013 Early Season MDWFP Waterfowl and Wetland Habitat Report**

The November 2013 aerial waterfowl survey has been delayed due to inclement weather conditions during the intended survey period. Waterfowl Program biologists plan to conduct the December aerial waterfowl survey December 16-19. Although a pre-season comprehensive survey has not been conducted, biologists have observed wetland conditions and waterfowl numbers and have compiled field reports from public and private land managers.

Due to abundant rainfall in October, wetland habitat was much more abundant this year than the opening weekend of the 2012-13 season. Although wetland habitat was more abundant this year; managed, permanent, and semi-permanent wetlands remained very important during the early portion of the hunting season. Areas with pumping capabilities provided quality hunting opportunities for the opening segment of the season. Waterfowl were abundant on most Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) with waterfowl management capabilities, but rain and high winds hampered hunting success on many areas. In the weeks leading up to the waterfowl hunting season, managers of many WMAs across the state have been pumping water into waterfowl impoundments and greentree reservoirs. Recent reports indicate gadwall, pintail, teal, wigeon, and mallards quickly began to use these areas when water levels began to build.

Mallards appear to be most abundant on managed moist-soil habitats, early flooded rice fields, and soybean fields. These ducks may begin to forage more heavily in flooded agriculture fields in the coming days with the forecast of freezing temperatures for this week. Several private and public land managers have reported high numbers of ducks for this time of year on their properties, particularly mallards. These observations could be the result of recent cold fronts pushing concentrations of ducks into Mississippi earlier than in recent years. Long Point Waterfowl's duck migration forecast predicts that some ducks should be moving out of latitudes to the north over the course of the week. Recent rainfall should provide additional waterfowl habitat in the Delta region of the state.

Many waterfowl hunters in Mississippi are optimistic with reports of record high breeding population estimates last spring. Mississippi duck hunters should keep in mind that many factors influence whether or not those birds will show up here in mass. Winter weather and habitat conditions play a major role in the success of Mississippi waterfowlers.

Visit the Waterfowl Program website for weekly waterfowl reports. These reports will provide hunters with up-to-date information on habitat conditions, hunting success, waterfowl abundance, and habitat use. Waterfowl reports and a wealth of other information are available at [www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl](http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl).

## Reports for Specific WMAs

- Howard Miller WMA- The conventional rice that was planted produced very well. Most moist-soil areas have strips of corn and Sudan grass planted to provide hunter cover and supplemental waterfowl foods. However, dry and hot conditions in late summer caused many of these plantings to suffer. Cover in moist-soil areas and soybean fields may be limited. Food availability in moist-soil areas is excellent, dominated by wild millet and sprangletop with little competition from non-desirable vegetation. All impoundments were flooded for opening day. Many gadwall, mallards, pintail, teal, and shovelers are currently making extensive use of rice and soybean fields at Howard Miller WMA.
- Mahannah WMA- Moist-soil plants have responded very well after prolonged spring flooding. Sudan grass was planted in strips to provide hunter cover. Overall, the area's waterfowl food abundance is excellent. Gadwall, teal, mallards, and shovelers have been observed in moist-soil areas on Mahannah WMA.
- Muscadine Farms WMA- Moist-soil plants have produced well. Some areas were disked or mowed to clear dense areas of natural vegetation before flooding. Many impoundments have strips of Sudan grass and millet for hunter cover and supplemental waterfowl foods. Overall, waterfowl foraging and roosting habitat on Muscadine will be excellent, and some impoundments have been flooded since September. At least one impoundment per hunt unit was flooded for opening day. Recent reports indicated that mallards, gadwall, teal, and shovelers were the most abundant species on this area.
- O'Keefe WMA- The waterfowl impoundments on O'Keefe WMA contain a wide variety of waterfowl foods. The contract farmer grew soybeans with alternating strips of corn. The strips of corn were left standing for waterfowl food and hunter cover. Moist soil production was very good in most impoundments and some areas were supplemented with millet and corn plantings. Some vegetation management within the moist soil areas was completed to clear dense areas of undesirable vegetation before flooding. One segment of the greentree reservoir (GTR) is flooded to provide a forested component to the area's waterfowl habitat complex.
- Charlie Capps WMA- Moist-soil plants responded very well to a late wet spring. Impoundments have a diversity of waterfowl foods and abundant cover. Managers have mowed and disked areas for waterfowl access in most impoundments. Large-scale removal of old stumps and clearing of thick brush has opened up many areas within impoundments for waterfowl access.
- Malmaison WMA- Water levels in the McIntyre Scatters portion of the WMA are high enough for boats with mud motors to access most of the area, and duck numbers were very good leading up to the season opener. The GTR portion of the WMA is flooded in some areas, and water levels will continue to rise throughout the winter.