MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 13 - 16, 2017

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The mid-November MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of November 13 – 16. Although observed wetland habitat was limited, waterfowl habitat availability was closer to the “normal” range in the Mississippi Delta region of the state when compared with last November. As expected, shallowly managed water was rarely observed across much of the Mississippi Delta. Public lands held the majority of intensively managed, shallowly flooded wetland habitat. As a result, waterfowl were observed responding to these areas, often in high numbers. An abundance of harvested agricultural fields have been disked, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl if the fields are eventually flooded. As in most years, flooded habitat availability generally increased as survey transects moved further northeast.

Duck abundance estimates were considerably higher than recent years’ November estimates (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for all groups of ducks were much higher than the long-term averages for November surveys, with mallards and other dabbling ducks more than doubling the long-term averages (Table 2). Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 60% of all duck observations, which is typical for this time of year in Mississippi. Gadwalls and northern shovelers were the two most abundant species observed overall. Ruddy ducks, scaup, and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively. With the regular waterfowl hunting season set to open November 24, MDWFP biologists are optimistic that Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for a good start to the season. Youth hunters got their first chance at duck hunting for the year on Saturday, November 18 and many WMAs offered quality hunting opportunities with several youth harvesting their first ducks. A push of cold air from the north is currently moving across the upper Midwest and Great Lakes regions, and is predicted to persist through this week. This weather could yield a southern migration of waterfowl down portions of the Mississippi Flyway to supplement the numbers of birds already present.

The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundance of ducks overall, followed by the southeastern region. Mallards and other dabbling ducks were most abundant in the northeastern region. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the northwestern region.

Most mallards were observed using flooded agricultural fields, followed closely by moist-soil habitat (natural vegetation such as grasses and sedges) on intensively managed public and private lands. Most dabbling ducks other than mallards, as well as diving ducks were observed heavily using large catfish pond complexes. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where a large complex of wetland habitat was available.

A few large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross’ geese) were observed during the November survey. Moderate numbers of greater white-fronted geese were observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

The first segment of the regular duck season will begin on November 24, 2017. 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 November survey period, 2015-2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>November 2015</th>
<th>November 2016</th>
<th>November 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mallards</td>
<td>30,933</td>
<td>36,540</td>
<td>88,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Dabblers</td>
<td>57,702</td>
<td>212,469</td>
<td>303,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diving Ducks</td>
<td>54,167</td>
<td>124,240</td>
<td>109,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Ducks</strong></td>
<td><strong>142,802</strong></td>
<td><strong>373,249</strong></td>
<td><strong>500,591</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the November survey period, 2015-2017.
Table 2. Comparison of November 2017 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species Group</th>
<th>November 2017</th>
<th>November LTA</th>
<th>% Change from Nov LTA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mallards</td>
<td>88,019</td>
<td>42,080</td>
<td>+109.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Dabblers</td>
<td>303,472</td>
<td>147,320</td>
<td>+105.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diving Ducks</td>
<td>109,101</td>
<td>84,388</td>
<td>+29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Ducks</strong></td>
<td><strong>500,591</strong></td>
<td><strong>273,789</strong></td>
<td><strong>+82.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta
Nov. 13-16, 2017

Description
- **Low** (<12/mi²)
- **Medium** (12-115/mi²)
- **High** (>115/mi²)
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta
Nov. 13-16, 2017

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

Prepared by MDWFP GIS Lab 20 Nov. 2017
Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 13-16, 2017

Description

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.

Prepared by MDWFP GIS Lab 20 Nov. 2017
Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations in the Mississippi Delta.