MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

January 24 - 28, 2019

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The late January MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey occurred the week of January 24 – 28, 2019. Wetland habitat availability remained well above the levels typically observed during this time of year. Shallowly managed water was observed across much of the Mississippi Delta landowners and managers captured rainfall over the fall and winter. Due to consistent rainfall this fall, many harvested agricultural fields have been left undisturbed (not disked under). This has likely resulted in increased food resources for dry-feeding geese and for ducks when fields become flooded. Flooded habitat was readily available in most regions of the Mississippi Delta, especially in the Yazoo backwater area in the South Delta and the lands between the Mississippi River levees. Water levels remained relatively high in most drainages, creeks, and rivers, and "natural" over-bank flooding was observed in many areas.

Continuing this season's trend, late January duck abundance estimates were lower than recent years' late January estimates in the Mississippi Delta region (Table 1 and Figure 1). Estimates for mallards, other dabblers, divers, and total ducks all remained lower than their long-term averages for the late January period (Table 2), but numbers did significantly increase from this year's earlier survey estimates. Dabblers other than mallards comprised about 60% of all duck observations, which is slightly higher than usual for this time of year in Mississippi. Mallards and northern shovelers were by far the most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, making up approximately 28% each. Scaup and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed, respectively.

This late-season increase in duck abundance is likely due to the recent and ongoing winter storm sweeping across the United States. This weather event has been the first and only event significant enough to cause a large migration event from northern and mid-latitude areas. Some waterfowl hunters across the state reported increased success during the final weekend of the season, and many are looking forward to taking youth hunters out on the final youth waterfowl hunting day on February 2.

The southwestern portion of the Delta held the greatest abundances of mallards, other dabblers, and total ducks overall. The greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed in the southeastern region. Mallards and other dabbling ducks were observed extensively using flooded agricultural fields, followed by permanent water areas such as rivers and lakes. As usual, most diving ducks were observed using large catfish pond complexes. However, a high proportion of diving duck observations were also recorded in flooded agriculture fields. Since many fields are still holding much deeper water than usual, this may have caused a wider than usual dispersal of diving ducks. In general, the abundant habitat available across the Delta could have negatively impacted our ability to detect some large concentrations of ducks. As expected, duck abundance was greatest in areas where large complexes of wetland habitat were available.

Many large concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross' geese) were still observed across the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey. Waterfowl hunters interested in the light goose conservation order may have quality opportunities in the coming weeks if goose numbers maintain high levels or continue to increase. Also, large numbers of greater white-fronted geese were again observed using large agricultural fields (both dry and flooded) and levees around production catfish ponds.

Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the late January survey periods, 2008-2019.

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
Average	**227,526**	**377,185**	**130,050**	**723,573**

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

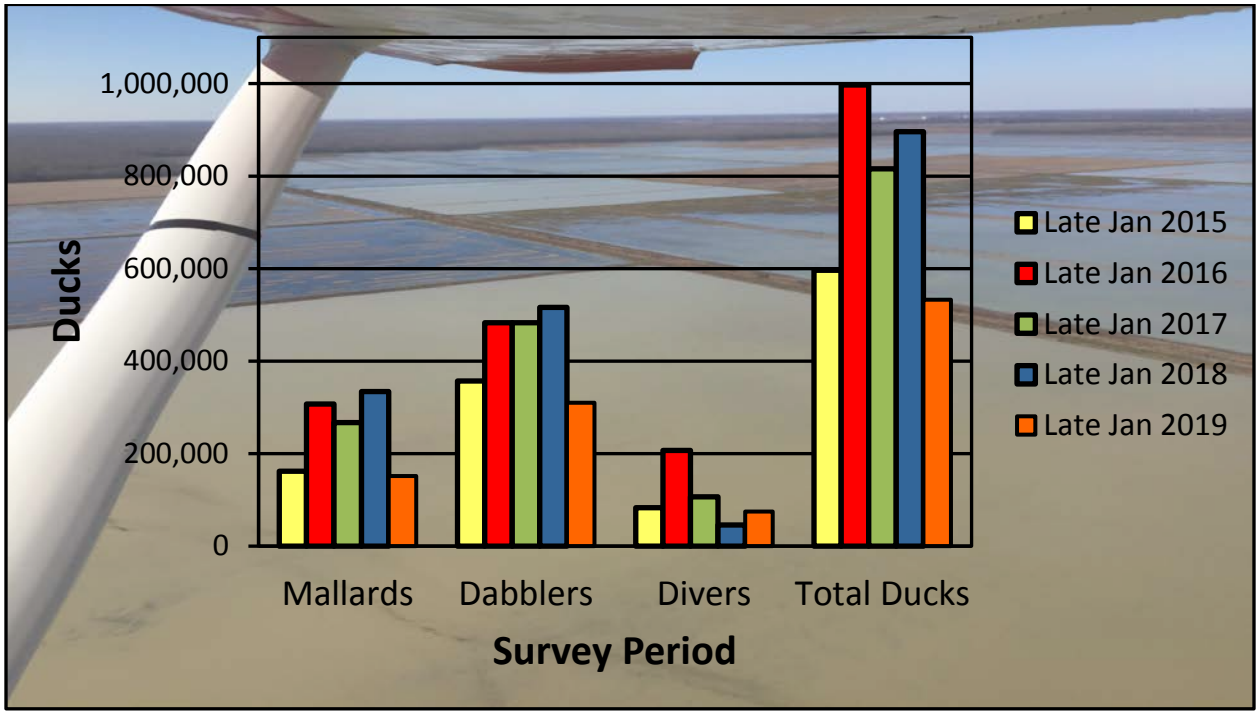
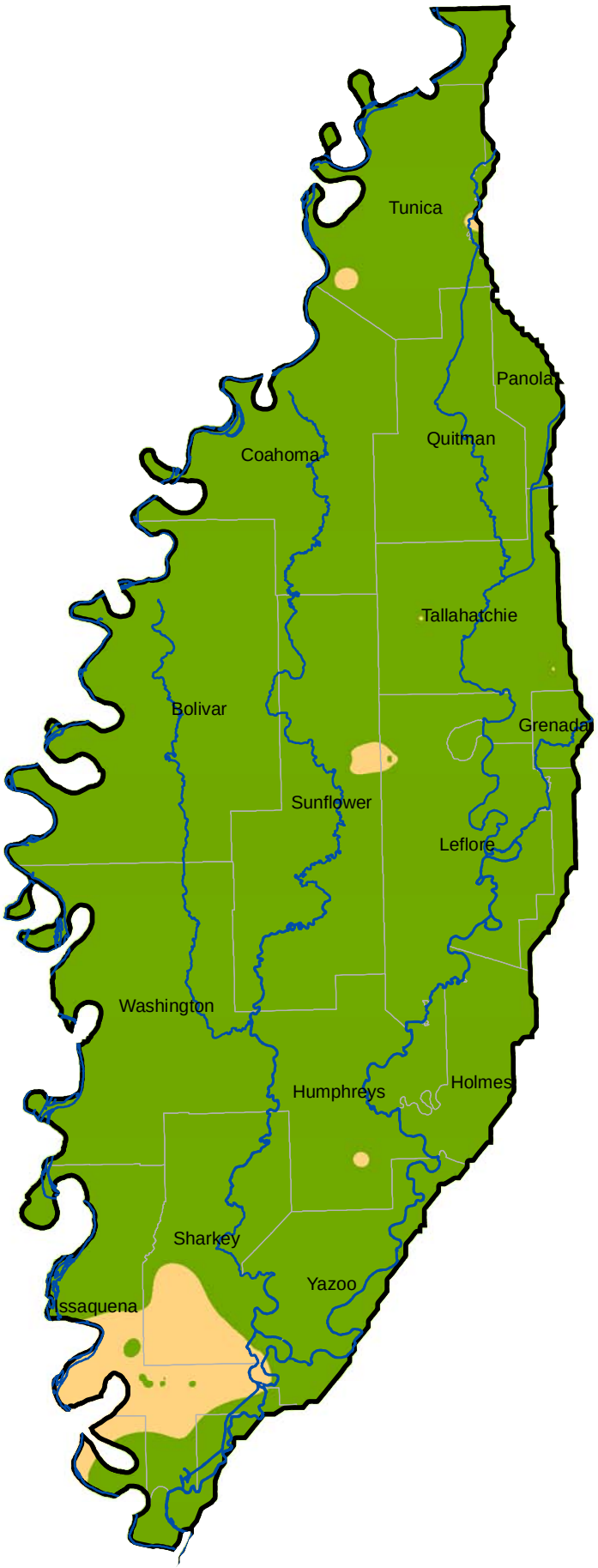


Table 2. Comparison of late January 2019 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for late January survey estimates.

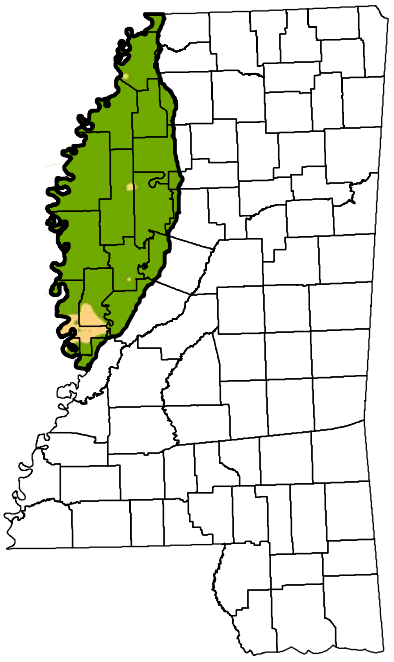
Species Group	Late January 2019	Late January LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	151,742	227,526	-33.3%
Other Dabblers	309,696	377,185	-17.9%
Diving Ducks	74,525	130,050	-42.7%
Total Ducks	**532,413**	**723,573**	**-26.4%**

Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 24-28, 2019



Description

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



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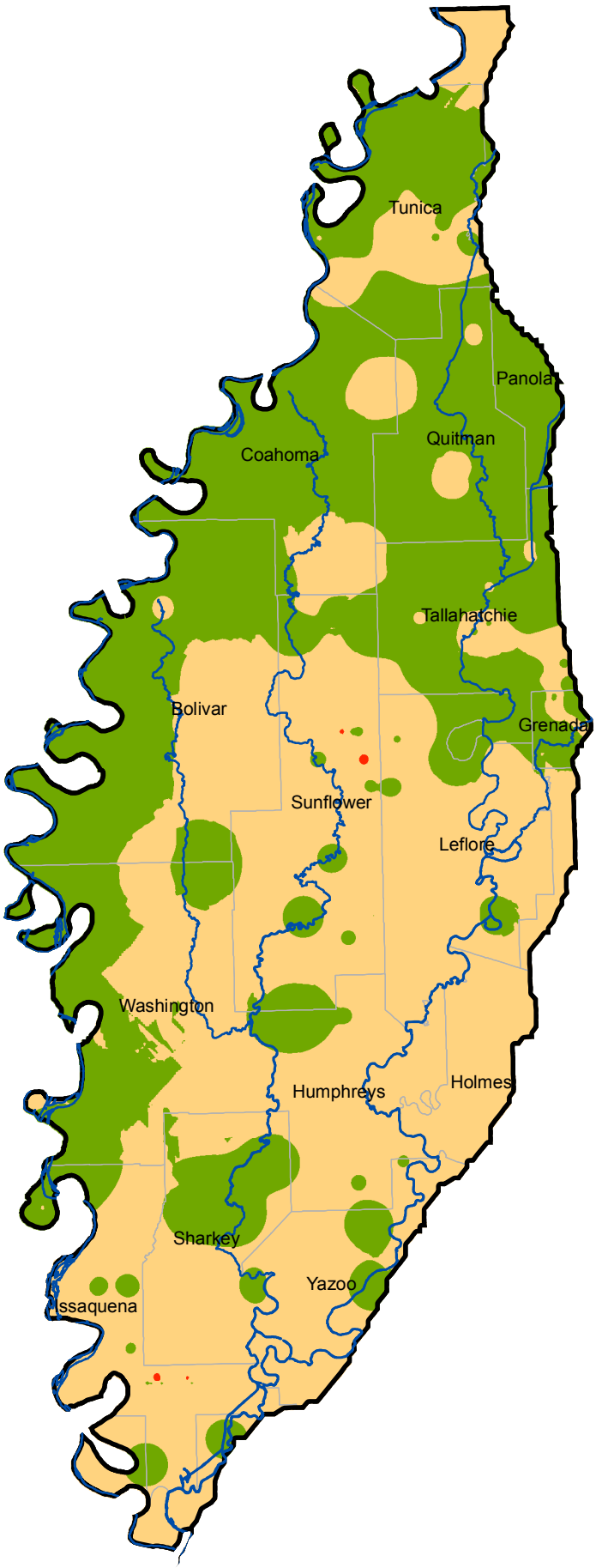
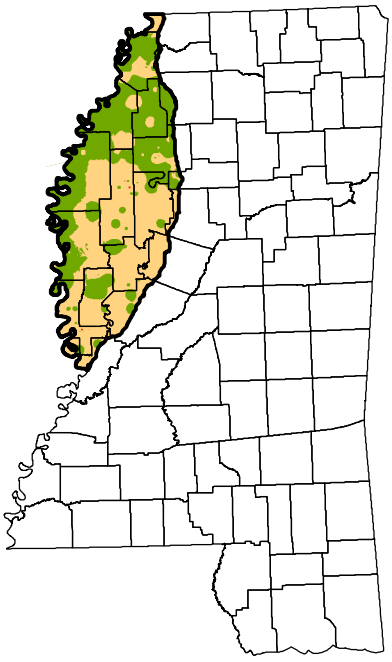
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 24-28, 2019



Description

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



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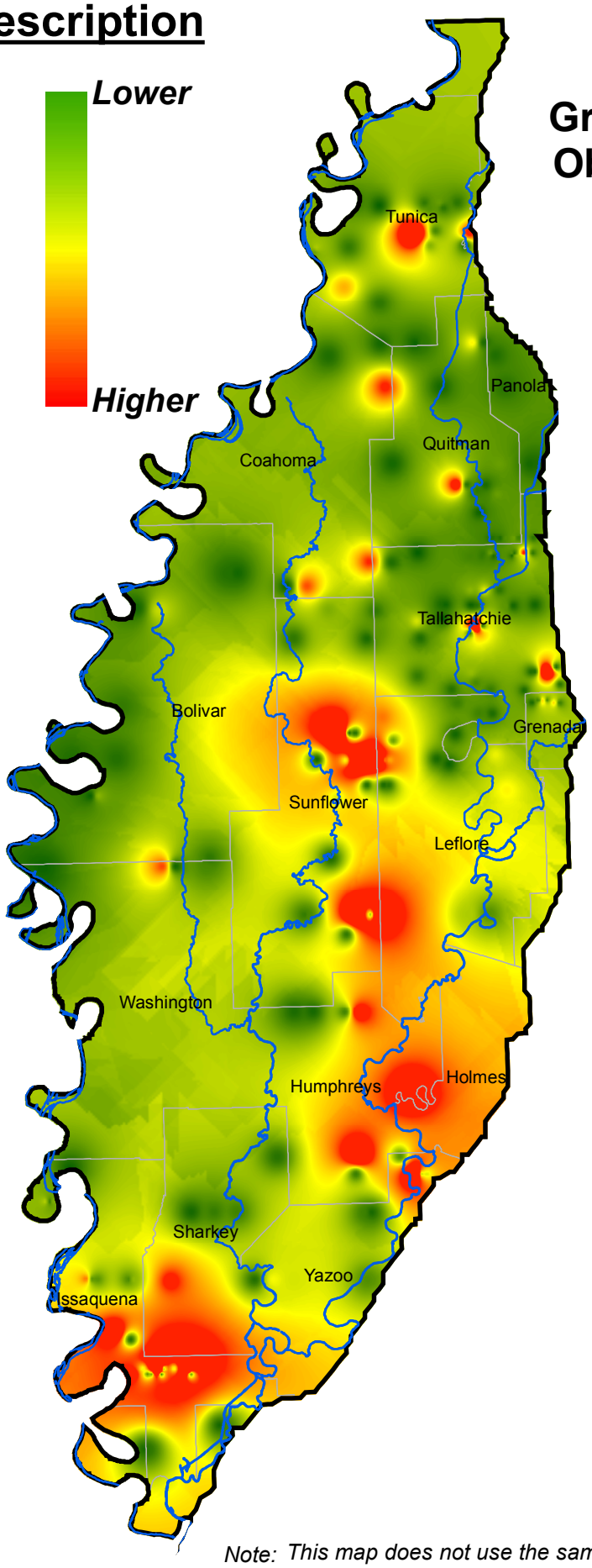
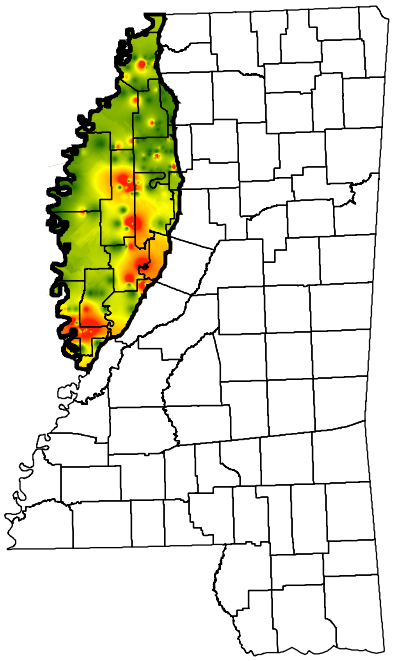
Description

Lower

Higher

Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 24-28, 2019





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.

Prepared by MDWFP
GIS Lab 26 Dec. 2018

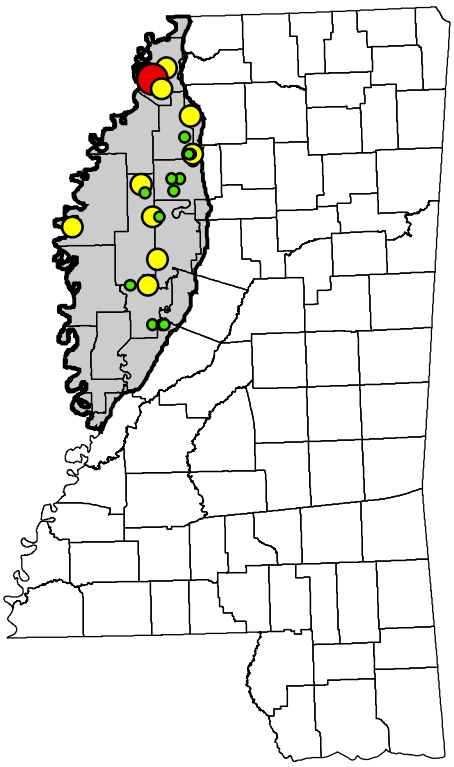
Locations and relative size of light goose flocks in the Mississippi Delta Jan. 24-28, 2019

Tunica
Panola
Quitman
Coahoma
Tallahatchie
Bolivar
Grenada
Sunflower
Leflore
Washington
Humphreys
Holmes
Sharkey
Yazoo
Issaquena

Description

Lower

Higher



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.

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