

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES**  
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Waterfowl Population Estimates  
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below  
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal zone: Jan. 3-4, 6, 2011  
Scaup Survey: Jan. 11, NW Louisiana: Jan 12  
NE LA Jan. 13-14 & Catahoula Lake Jan. 13

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	169,000	18,000	5,000	192,000
MOTTLED	43,000	44,000		87,000
GADWALL	518,000	592,000	8,000	1,118,000
WIGEON	18,000	5,000		23,000
GW TEAL	439,000	245,000	**	684,000
BW TEAL	57,000	64,000		121,000
SHOVELER	299,000	36,000	2,000	337,000
PINTAIL	77,000	104,000	39,000	220,000
<b>TOTAL DABBLERS</b>	<b>1,620,000</b>	<b>1,108,000</b>	<b>54,000</b>	<b>2,782,000</b>
SCAUP	64,000	89,000	1,000	154,000
RINGNECKED	66,000	200,000	40,000	306,000
CANVASBACK	7,000	9,000	26,000	42,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>137,000</b>	<b>298,000</b>	<b>67,000</b>	<b>502,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,757,000</b>	<b>1,406,000</b>	<b>121,000</b>	<b>3,284,000</b>
COOTS	536,000	1,485,000		2,021,000

\*\*Less than 1,000

**COMMENTS:**

The 3.28 million ducks estimated on this survey is 50% higher than the December estimate of 2.17 million, and 21% higher than last January's estimate of 2.7 million. It is also 23% higher than the most recent 5-year average (2.67 million) and 8% higher than the long-term average (3.05 million).

All species except canvasbacks increased from December, and mottled ducks, gadwalls, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, shovelers, and ring-necked ducks were above long-term averages. Mallards and canvasbacks were about half their respective long-term averages, canvasbacks primarily because of a big decline seen on Catahoula Lake since the December survey.

Except for the reduction in ducks using Catahoula Lake (121,000 vs 282,000), the distribution of ducks was very similar on this survey compared to December. Large increases were seen in both southwest and southeast Louisiana as estimates for all species increased in both regions except for a 25% decline for ring-necked ducks in southwest Louisiana. The 1.76 million seen in southwest Louisiana is slightly less than the most recent 5-year average (1.84 million), but the 1.41 million in southeast Louisiana is nearly twice the 752,000 average of the past 5 years. Despite declining markedly from the December count, the 121,000 ducks seen on Catahoula Lake is still the highest count since 2006 and is 44% higher than the 5-year average of 84,000.

In southwest Louisiana, far more ducks were seen in the agricultural habitats between Gueydan and Abbeville from the marsh up to I-10 than in December. Large groups of mallards, pintails, shovelers, and greenwings were noted in that area. Otherwise, major concentrations of ducks were seen from Johnson's Bayou north to Sabine NWR, on Rockefeller Refuge and near White Lake, very similar to previous surveys. Although not counted on this survey, nearly continuous small flocks of scaup were seen offshore as we flew between transect lines from south of Calcasieu Lake to Chenier Au Tigre. There were few flocks larger than 100 birds, but they were loosely spaced and within a half-mile of shore continuously over that 60-mile distance.

In southeast Louisiana, more ducks were seen on each transect compared to December, and concentrations were similar to previous surveys. Large groups of mostly green-winged and blue-winged teal were seen in the Caernarvon and Delacroix areas with a large number of mottled ducks counted north of Delacroix; very large flocks of pintails and gadwalls were seen at the mouth of the Mississippi River; and big groups of ring-necked ducks were seen in upper Terrebonne Parish. While traveling between transects, 2 extensive flocks of many thousands of ducks were noted offshore from the Atchafalaya Delta WMA, southwest of the Wax Lake Delta and south of the mouth of the Atchafalaya River.

Another 91,000 ducks and 77,000 (15% white-fronted, 85% snow) geese were counted in selected habitats in northeastern Louisiana. This is 16% fewer ducks and 10% fewer geese than were seen in December and is less than half the ducks and geese seen in January 2010. It is the lowest January survey for northeast Louisiana since the surveyed area was standardized in 2005. Like much of the state, this region has received over 20 inches below normal rainfall and habitat conditions are well below average. During this survey, flooded agricultural habitat was almost entirely ice-covered with few concentrations of ducks or geese. Mallards and pintails were the most abundant species, and the largest concentrations were found between Bunkie and Grand Cote NWR, in a couple areas of open water between Bonita and Mer Rouge, and in fields southwest of Vidalia.

In contrast, we counted another 22,600 ducks in northwest Louisiana, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River and Upper Toledo Bend reservoir. This is over twice the ducks counted in December (10,600) and in January of last year (9,600), and is the highest number counted on this survey since at least 2005. Gadwalls and mallards were the most abundant species, making up over 50% of the total, with green-winged teal, shovelers, canvasbacks, and ring-necked ducks accounting for the remainder. The largest concentrations were seen on the Red River from south of Lock 4 to Lock 5 and then on managed shallow impoundments near Loggy Bayou.

During December and January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain,

and Borgne. An estimated 303,660 scaup were seen with about 297,000 tallied on Lake Pontchartrain. That is 35% fewer than the 467,700 estimated from the same survey in December, but is nearly 5 times the 64,000 estimated in January 2010. There is some lack of confidence in the estimate generated from this survey. The survey was first attempted on 4 January with light winds and increasing cloud cover, but after completing transects on Lakes Maurepas and Pontchartrain, a mishap caused the loss of one observer's data. Had we extrapolated the single observer's data, the estimate for Lake Pontchartrain alone would have exceeded 1 million scaup. Storms moving over Lake Borgne did not allow completion of that survey attempt, and the entire survey was re-flown on 7 January with 15-knot winds causing much rougher water conditions in the lakes. Consequently, the survey crew believes the 303,660 to be a minimum estimate of the scaup using these habitats.

With the exception of southeast Louisiana, where good quantities of submerged aquatics are still available in many areas and habitat conditions appear better than in recent years, large-scale habitat conditions over much of Louisiana continue to be below-average due to below normal rainfall. December rainfall totals were nearly 4 inches below normal for the month, and most areas are over 20 inches below normal for the year. However, similarly dry conditions north in the flyway combined with below normal temperatures have created conditions favorable for ducks moving into Louisiana at above average numbers.