

**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: Nov. 4, 7-8, 2011  
Catahoula Lake: Nov. 4, 2011  
NW LA: Nov. 3, 2011

November 9, 2011

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	5,000	3,000	1,000	9,000
MOTTLED	27,000	39,000	**	66,000
GADWALL	594,000	126,000	10,000	730,000
WIGEON	6,000	23,000	1,000	30,000
GW TEAL	168,000	31,000	6,000	205,000
BW TEAL	145,000	283,000	23,000	451,000
SHOVELER	118,000	23,000	2,000	143,000
PINTAIL	39,000	64,000	77,000	180,000
<b>TOTAL DABLERS</b>	<b>1,102,000</b>	<b>592,000</b>	<b>120,000</b>	<b>1,814,000</b>
SCAUP	6,000	2,000	1,000	9,000
RINGNECKED	6,000	2,000	9,000	17,000
CANVASBACK			1,000	1,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>12,000</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>27,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,114,000</b>	<b>596,000</b>	<b>131,000</b>	<b>1,841,000</b>
COOTS	833,000	994,000	12,000	1,839,000

\*\*Estimate is less than 1,000

**COMMENTS:**

The estimated 1.84 million ducks on this survey is 13% higher than last November's estimate of 1.62 million, 20% higher than the most recent 5-year average of 1.52 million, but still about 8% below the long-term average of 2.0 million. Similar to last year, gadwalls and blue-winged teal are by far the most abundant species with the bluewing estimate about the same as 2010 and that for gadwalls nearly 20% higher. Mallards and scaup, typically considered later-migrating species were down markedly

from last November, but estimates for all other species were higher or about the same. Surprisingly, the estimate for coots was the same as for ducks. The 1.84 million estimated coots is over twice that of 2010, and is the highest November estimate on record for this species since the survey began in 1969. Despite increases from last year, all duck species except blue-winged teal remain below long-term November averages.

The relative distribution of ducks in coastal Louisiana is similar to 2010 with about 65% of the ducks counted in southwest Louisiana with similar population increases from last year seen in both regions. The estimate in southeast Louisiana is the highest in the last 5 years and is likely representative of the better water levels in the marshes in that region compared to drier conditions further west. Large concentrations of ducks were seen near the mouth of the Mississippi River and north of Lake Salvador in the southeast survey region. In southwest Louisiana, drought conditions were more obvious, but where there were water and ducks, there were often large numbers. Concentrations were noted in the marshes west of Sabine NWR, on Rockefeller Refuge, and north of Intracoastal City. Large groups of ducks were not encountered on transect lines in the agricultural areas north of the marsh, but at least one very large group was noted between transect lines west of Gueydan. Despite the estimated number of ducks in southwest Louisiana being at the long-term average, distribution of those birds is more localized than in the past.

The duck population at Catahoula Lake was down substantially from the 209,000 counted there in November 2010. Despite small increases in diving ducks at Catahoula Lake, all other species declined markedly except for blue-winged teal. Declines in pintails (down 29,000), mallards (down 24,000), gadwalls (down 24,000), and shovelers (down 23,000) account for the difference from 2010.

Data from the NW Louisiana survey have not yet been received. The NE Louisiana survey is being expanded, converted to a statistically-designed transect-based survey coordinated with Arkansas and Mississippi to cover the entire Mississippi Alluvial Valley, and will be flown later this month. Both surveys will be reported on at a later date.

Although we have an above average number of ducks in the state relative to the last 5 years, the large numbers of blue-winged teal and very low number of mallards and diving ducks indicate that we are still early in migration. Severe cold weather has yet to move through the northern states and Canada, and as of last week there was no substantial snow cover or frozen habitat.

Habitat conditions in Louisiana for migrating and wintering waterfowl are poorer than last year and reduced from the September survey this year. The western portion of the state is in "exceptional drought" according the U.S. Drought Monitor, and rainfall totals range from 8-10 inches below normal in southeast Louisiana to 20-25 inches below normal in southwest and northwest Louisiana. Only managed shallow-flooding was seen in the agricultural region and that acreage was reduced from last year. Dry marshes with cracked pond bottoms were noted across southwest Louisiana along with large acreages with low water levels. Submerged aquatic vegetation important to foraging ducks was also reduced on the large scale but was abundant in some locations with better water levels. In southeast Louisiana water conditions are much better but SAV production was negatively affected by the storm surge from tropical storm Lee and is substantially lower than last year. At Catahoula Lake, the late drawdown kept soil conditions moist late into the summer which resulted in expanded duck potato but reduced sprangletop and chufa production, so food production is probably reduced from the excellent production last year. Water levels are currently within management targets and overall habitat conditions are good.