

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
POST OFFICE BOX 98000
BATON ROUGE, LA 70898-9000

Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Nov. 7-9, 2012
Catahoula Lake: Nov. 9, 2012

November 13, 2012

Reported By: L. Reynolds, J. Olszak,
and B. Davis
Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	13,000	2,000	2,000	17,000
MOTTLED	26,000	18,000		44,000
GADWALL	421,000	225,000	7,000	653,000
WIGEON	19,000	3,000	**	22,000
GW TEAL	169,000	78,000	6,000	253,000
BW TEAL	24,000	9,000	**	33,000
SHOVELER	64,000	10,000	7,000	81,000
PINTAIL	212,000	13,000	78,000	303,000
TOTAL DABLERS	948,000	358,000	100,000	1,406,000
SCAUP	15,000	9,000		24,000
RINGNECKED	15,000	16,000	2,000	31,000
CANVASBACK				
TOTAL DIVERS	30,000	25,000	2,000	33,000
TOTAL DUCKS	978,000	383,000	102,000	1,463,000
COOTS	397,000	158,000	**	555,000

**Estimate is less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimated 1.46 million ducks on this survey is 20% lower than last November's estimate of 1.84 million, about the same as the most recent 5-year average of 1.47 million, and 27% below the long-term average of 2.0 million. The biggest differences between this survey and last November's are: 1) a huge decline in blue-winged teal from 451,000 to only 33,000, 2) far fewer coots from a record high 1.84 million to 555,000, and 3) a 36% decline in total ducks in southeast Louisiana, likely due to a hurricane Isaac-induced reduction in habitat quality in that region. Bluewings and coots were down

substantially in all surveyed regions. Compared to last November's survey, mottled ducks, gadwalls, wigeon, shovelers, and canvasbacks were also down, while mallards, green-winged teal, pintails, scaup, and ring-necked ducks were up. However, only pintails were at or above the 30-year November average.

The relative distribution of ducks in coastal Louisiana shifted back toward southwest Louisiana where nearly three-quarters of the ducks along the coast were counted. In the past 2 years, a larger proportion of ducks were counted in southeast Louisiana because of better habitat conditions than exist this year in that region. The number of ducks at Catahoula Lake was similar to 2011 except for the lack of bluewings. Concentrations of ducks were noted in the marshes south of Calcasieu Lake, on the East Cove unit of Cameron Prairie NWR, over to the western side of Rockefeller Refuge, and in the flooded ag fields northwest of Gueydan in southwest Louisiana. No large concentrations were noted in southeast Louisiana, but solid numbers of ducks were noted in the Caernarvon outfall area and the upper Terrebonne marshes.

This survey provided some mixed signals regarding migration chronology. More mallards and scaup, typically considered later migrants, and the very low number of bluewings suggests recent cold weather and drier than average conditions in states north of us have spurred an earlier migration into Louisiana habitats. Although not counted, flocks of scaup were noted offshore at the southern end of survey transects from south of White Lake over to Marsh Island and in major bays of southwest Louisiana which is more typical of December and January surveys. However, diving ducks counted on Catahoula Lake were more consistent with early-migration conditions, as were the lower counts of gadwalls and shovelers compared to last November.

Because of logistic problems and a lack of trained observers, the NW Louisiana survey was not flown until today, and the expanded transect-based NE Louisiana survey may be delayed. Both surveys will be reported on at a later date.

Habitat conditions for migrating and wintering waterfowl are much improved from last year's drought conditions in southwest Louisiana. Good stands of seed-producing annuals and excellent submerged aquatic vegetation were noted along a number of transects. Water levels appear to have fallen since the September survey providing near optimum conditions for feeding ducks. Shallow flooding in the agricultural appears to be at least average but slightly reduced from September. In southeast Louisiana, habitat conditions remain much poorer than last year in the eastern portion of the region as a result of the storm surge from hurricane Isaac, but some recovery in submerged aquatic vegetation was noted at the mouth of the river and near Delacroix. Habitat conditions in the upper Terrebonne marshes over to the Atchafalaya Delta appear to be at least average. At Catahoula Lake, the slighter earlier drawdown and intermittent rainfall has generated better food production than last year. Water levels are currently within management targets and overall habitat conditions are good.