

**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. 11,18, and 22  
Catahoula Lake: Jan , 23  
NE LA: Jan. 23-25, 28  
NW LA: Jan. 7, Scaup: Jan 13

January 29, 2013

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	176,000	4,000	1,000	181,000
MOTTLED	28,000	23,000		51,000
GADWALL	468,000	274,000	1,000	743,000
WIGEON	7,000	4,000	**	11,000
GW TEAL	389,000	193,000	**	495,000
BW TEAL	35,000	21,000		56,000
SHOVELER	384,000	17,000	**	401,000
PINTAIL	81,000	10,000	**	91,000
<b>TOTAL DABLERS</b>	<b>1,568,000</b>	<b>546,000</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>2,115,000</b>
SCAUP	140,000	85,000	**	225,000
RINGNECKED	149,000	41,000	3,000	193,000
CANVASBACK	5,000	46,000	36,000	87,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>294,000</b>	<b>172,000</b>	<b>39,000</b>	<b>505,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,862,000</b>	<b>718,000</b>	<b>41,000</b>	<b>2,621,000</b>
COOTS	298,000	508,000	**	806,000

\*\*Estimate is less than 1,000

**COMMENTS:**

The 2.62 million ducks estimated from this survey is 30% higher than the December estimate but 6% lower than last January's estimate of 2.79 million. It is 7% higher than the most recent 5-year average of 2.44 million but is 14% below the long-term average of 3.05 million. Increases in mallards (81,000 to 181,000), green-winged teal (255,000 to 582,000), shovelers (130,000 to 401,000), and scaup

(156,000 to 225,000) outpaced decreases in pintails (219,000 to 91,000) and ring-necked ducks (294,000 to 193,000) to account for most of the difference between the December and January survey totals. All diving duck species were above long-term January averages. Conversely, all dabbling ducks except greenwings and shovelers were below long-term averages, and the estimates for wigeon and pintails were the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest on record respectively.

Estimates for both SW and SE coastal regions increased from December to January, but gains in SW Louisiana were much greater such that 72% of the ducks estimated in coastal Louisiana were found in southwest marshes compared to 65% in December. That is in stark contrast to last January when 30% more ducks were counted in southeast Louisiana marshes than in southwest. Indeed, January 2012's estimate of 1,512,000 total ducks in southeast Louisiana marshes was more than twice that estimated this year. Furthermore, the estimate for coots in that region fell from 2.64 million last year to only 508,000 this January further suggesting a drastic decline in habitat quality almost certainly due to hurricane Isaac's severe damage to the submerged aquatic food resources in late summer. Ducks were widely dispersed in southeast Louisiana, and the only concentration was noted at the north end of Biloxi WMA. In southwest Louisiana, concentrations were noted in flooded agricultural fields just north of the marsh from Highway 27 east to White Lake and a sewage lagoon near Rayne.

Water level at Catahoula Lake was up substantially from the management target during this survey, and dabbling ducks declined from 155,000 in December to only 2,000 in January. Diving ducks also declined from 84,000 to only 39,000 between the December and January surveys with fewer of all species. The 41,000 total ducks counted on this survey is less than half of both the 95,000 counted last January and the most recent 5-year January average of 92,500. Rainfall of 10-18 inches since January 1 across much of southwest through north-central Louisiana, including during the 10-day span of the coastal transect survey, resulted in big increases in flooded habitat in agricultural fields from the southwest Louisiana marshes through central Louisiana around Catahoula Lake and into northeast Louisiana. Concentrations of ducks were noted in un-surveyed agricultural habitats north of I-10 while in transit to survey transects, and some redistribution of ducks from deep-flooded marshes and Catahoula Lake to these newly available habitats is likely.

In January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne. An estimated 2,370 scaup were seen with 80% on Lake Borgne and the remainder on Lake Pontchartrain. This is substantially higher than December's record low of only 301, but is still the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest count on record for this survey behind last month and the December and January 2005/06 surveys conducted after hurricane Katrina. As reported in December, hunting reports, band recoveries, and the coastal transect survey estimates suggest larger scaup populations in Louisiana than indicated by this survey.

Neither northwest nor northeast Louisiana surveys have been reported this season because of logistic and weather-related delays in conducting surveys, timing of the split in the new West Zone, and the need to train new observers for the NE survey. The NW survey was conducted in November, December and January using traditional survey locations and methods. Training new observers has delayed the conversion of the NE survey to transect-based methods, and the old cruise survey was conducted in December and January because it affords better opportunity for observers to see, identify, and count larger numbers of birds.

In NW Louisiana, 9,800, 18,900, and 12,500 ducks were counted on November, December, and January surveys respectively. On all surveys, gadwalls, mallards, and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant species, and Toledo Bend reservoir, the Red River from Lock 4 to Shreveport, and managed moist-soil units near Loggy Bayou held the most ducks. The November survey was nearly 80% higher than in 2011; the December survey was not flown in 2011 due to poor weather so no comparison is possible; and the January survey was 24% lower than the 16,500 counted last year and 16% below the

most recent 5-year average of 14,800. Between the December and January survey, declines in mallards (4,200 to 2,200), ring-necked ducks (4,600 to 2,400), wigeon (1,000 to 100), and canvasback (700 to 200) accounted for most of the difference while only green-winged teal and shovelers showed increases between the 2 surveys.

In northeast Louisiana, 271,000 ducks and 200,000 geese (74% snow and 26% white-fronted) were counted in selected habitats during December. This was the highest December duck count in this region since the survey was standardized in 2005, (surveys were not completed in 2006, 2007, and 2011). Mallards (71,000), gadwalls (57,000), pintails (55,200) and green-winged teal (48,000) were the most abundant species and large concentrations were noted in flooded agricultural fields around Grand Cote NWR, southeast of Bonita, and just north of Oak Ridge. In January, 240,000 ducks and 118,000 geese (89% snow and 11% white-fronted) were counted in the same habitats. Gadwalls (55,000), green-winged teal (45,000), shovelers (44,000), and pintails (33,000) were the most abundant species and the largest concentrations were seen in the agricultural fields around Grand Cote NWR and in southern East Carroll Parish. The decline in mallards (71,000 to 29,000) was the biggest difference between the December and January counts in this region. Although an 11% decline from the December survey, the total ducks counted in January is similarly the highest since 2005. Comparisons with last January's estimates from a transect-based survey (89,000 ducks and 245,000 geese) are not advised because of such different survey methodology. The number of geese counted on this survey is 24% below the 2007-2011 average of 156,000 geese.

Habitat conditions changed greatly during the survey with the heavy rainfall during early to mid-January, resulting in higher-than-optimal water levels in the marshes in southwest Louisiana and Catahoula Lake but much additional habitat in agricultural regions. Water is being rapidly removed from fields to prepare for planting, but habitat conditions for wintering ducks remains well above average in agricultural regions.