

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: Dec.10-12, 2013
Catahoula Lake: Dec. 11, 2013
Scaup Survey: Dec. 13, 2013

December 16, 2013

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	87,000	4,000	3,000	94,000
MOTTLED	26,000	20,000	**	46,000
GADWALL	497,000	252,000	**	749,000
WIGEON	3,000	10,000	**	13,000
GW TEAL	212,000	73,000	**	285,000
BW TEAL	25,000	14,000		39,000
SHOVELER	184,000	4,000	**	188,000
PINTAIL	31,000	161,000	2,000	194,000
TOTAL DABLERS	1,065,000	538,000	5,000	1,608,000
SCAUP	24,000	22,000	1,000	47,000
RINGNECKED	108,000	103,000	22,000	233,000
CANVASBACK	5,000	13,000	48,000	66,000
TOTAL DIVERS	137,000	138,000	71,000	346,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,202,000	679,000	76,000	1,954,000
COOTS	573,000	380,000	4,000	957,000

** Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 1.95 million ducks from this survey is nearly twice the 1.02 million estimated in November, but is 5% lower than last December's estimate of 2.06 million, 11% lower than the most recent 5-year average of 2.2 million, and 25% lower than the long-term December average of 2.6 million. Although a big increase from November, the total was unexpectedly low given the recent cold weather, including ice/snow further north in the flyway. However, an independent survey of coastal

WMA habitats flown last week confirmed below-average number of ducks for December.

There has been a significant migration into the state as evidenced by the large increase in mallards (1,000 to 94,000), canvasbacks (zero to 66,000), scaup (zero to 47,000), and ring-necked ducks (26,000 to 233,000) from the November survey. Indeed, all species increased from the November survey except wigeon, which remained the same, and blue-winged teal, which declined from 140,000 to 39,000. However, all species except shovelers, ring-necked ducks and canvasbacks were below their long-term December averages. Increases from November were seen proportionally in both southwest and southeast regions of the coastal zone with approximately double the number of ducks from last month counted in both regions. Consequently, the distribution of ducks remained the same with about two-thirds of the ducks counted in southwest Louisiana where concentrations were noted in the marshes between Little Pecan and Grand Lake and northeast of Pecan Island, as well as some agricultural fields south of Welsh. Although geese are not counted on this survey, a big increase in snow geese was noted since the November survey primarily in the agricultural fields between Bell City and Kaplan. In southeast Louisiana, a large concentration of pintails was noted near the mouth of the Mississippi River, sizeable groups of ring-necked ducks and gadwalls were seen in the intermediate marshes of Terrebonne Parish, and although not counted on the coastal transect survey, large numbers of gadwalls were seen in the marshes between Lakes St. Catherine and Borgne.

The count at Catahoula Lake fell by more than half from the November count of 154,000, largely because of the lack of dabbling ducks despite water levels being at target levels and providing good habitat for dabblers. However, water levels had been higher for much of the first hunting season segment. Catahoula Lake is heavily hunted, and traditionally, the December survey is conducted after over a week of closed season. However, because of this year's 5-day split in the East Zone, the survey was conducted after only 2 days, which may have impacted counts there. In December 2012, 239,000 total ducks were counted at Catahoula Lake including 155,000 dabbling ducks, and this December's count is the lowest since 2009 when only 69,000 were counted on the lake.

In December and January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne, and 278,000 scaup were estimated on this survey. That is a huge increase from last December's record low of 301. Indeed, the 52,000 scaup counted on Lake Borgne is a record high, and the 226,000 counted on Lake Pontchartrain is 28% above the December average for that lake. Overall, the estimate is 50% above the long-term December average. Last year, the scaup estimate from the coastal transect survey in December was well over twice the long-term average while the scaup survey on these lakes produced a record low. That was presumably due to some habitat effect of hurricane Isaac because we have seen very low scaup surveys following hurricanes in that area. This year, despite above average numbers of scaup on this survey, lower than average numbers were counted on the coastal transect survey suggesting habitat conditions in Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne are much improved over last year.

As reported in November, habitat conditions in the state are very good and have improved in the agricultural region of southwest Louisiana where recent rainfall has increased the amount of shallow flooding in those habitats. Good submerged aquatic vegetation growth continues to be noted in coastal habitats, and lower water levels since the November survey created more favorable conditions for foraging waterfowl in southeast Louisiana. With water levels back down to targeted levels, habitat at Catahoula Lake also remains improved from last year. It seems unlikely that poor habitat conditions are a factor in the relatively low estimate of ducks from this survey.

Because of the bad weather during the first week in December, the 5-day split in East Zone season, and demands for aircraft last week before both the Coastal and East Zones re-opened, the northeast and northwest Louisiana surveys will be flown this week. The northeast Louisiana survey was not

completed last month. Both surveys will be reported on next week if they are completed.