

**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. 6-8  
Catahoula Lake: Jan. 6  
NE LA: Jan. 6-7  
NW LA: Jan. 23, Scaup: Jan 14

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	137,000	15,000	2,000	154,000
MOTTLED	26,000	24,000		50,000
GADWALL	605,000	335,000	1,000	941,000
WIGEON	9,000	5,000		14,000
GW TEAL	371,000	229,000	**	600,000
BW TEAL	17,000	12,000		29,000
SHOVELER	340,000	10,000	**	350,000
PINTAIL	118,000	74,000	1,000	193,000
<b>TOTAL DABLERS</b>	<b>1,623,000</b>	<b>704,000</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>2,331,000</b>
SCAUP	22,000	71,000	**	93,000
RINGNECKED	244,000	127,000	22,000	393,000
CANVASBACK	5,000	12,000	38,000	55,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>271,000</b>	<b>210,000</b>	<b>60,000</b>	<b>541,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,894,000</b>	<b>914,000</b>	<b>64,000</b>	<b>2,872,000</b>
COOTS	502,000	857,000	2,000	1,359,000

\*\*Estimate is less than 1,000

**COMMENTS:**

The 2.87 million ducks estimated from this survey is 47% higher than the December estimate of 1.95 million, 10% higher than last January's estimate of 2.62 million and the most recent 5-year average, but is 6% below the long-term average. Estimates for all species except blue-winged teal and canvasback were similar or higher than those in December with big increases in green-winged teal (285,000 to

600,000), gadwall (749,000 to 941,000), shovelers (188,000 to 350,000) and ring-necked ducks (233,000 to 393,000) accounting for most of the difference between the 2 survey totals. Those same 4 species were the only ones above long-term January averages; all others were below. Despite colder temperatures, and increased snow and ice cover up the Flyway, estimates were lower on the coastal transects this January than in January of 2013 for mallards (154,00 vs 181,000), typically considered an important late-migrant. The mallard estimate is 60% below the long-term average.

There was clearly a significant migration into the state since the December survey. However, the increase was greater in southwest Louisiana, where overall population increased 57% from the December to January surveys compared to only 35% in southeast Louisiana. Two-thirds of the ducks counted in coastal Louisiana were seen in the southwest region, but the total number was about the same as last January, while the estimate for southeast Louisiana was 27% higher than in January, 2013.

The largest concentrations of ducks in southwest Louisiana were seen on the open water of White Lake, where a huge multi-species raft of primarily dabbling ducks was noted; in the marshes northeast of Pecan Island; and on a sewage lagoon near Rayne that held large numbers of ring-necked ducks and shovelers. In southeast Louisiana, the only big concentrations of ducks were noted in Terrebonne Parish where large flocks of ring-necked ducks, gadwalls and green-winged teal were seen in the fresh and intermediate marsh. Although not counted on this survey, another big increase in snow geese was noted in the fields between Bell City and Kaplan.

Water level at Catahoula Lake was 8 inches above management target and level for the December survey, but still substantial habitat for dabbling ducks remains on the periphery of the lake. The numbers of dabbling ducks and ring-necked ducks were essentially un-changed from December, but 10,000 fewer canvasbacks were counted. Because of open hunting seasons, virtually all ducks were counted in the sanctuary in the center of the lake. Although the 64,000 ducks counted this year was 50% higher than last January, it is lower than the 95,000 counted the year before and the most recent 5-year January average of 83,000.

In January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borgne. An estimated 733,000 scaup were seen, the highest January survey on record, and the second highest scaup survey behind December, 2006 when 1.2 million were tallied. Nearly 670,000 were estimated on Lake Pontchartrain, and over 63,000 were estimated on Lake Borgne, which is the highest on record for the second consecutive survey for that lake. The total is over 2.5 times the December estimate, and nearly 5 times the long-term average of 150,000 for this survey. Interestingly, last January, there were 225,000 scaup estimated on the coastal transect survey, well above the long-term average of 174,000, but only 2,400 on the scaup survey of these large coastal lakes. In contrast, only 93,000 scaup were estimated on the coastal transect survey this year, but the second highest ever on the scaup survey. Also in contrast to past years, few scaup were noted offshore while traveling between transect lines.

Because of later opening days and shorter, staggered splits in the West and East Zone duck seasons, the NW and NE Louisiana surveys have not been reported thus far this season.

The NW survey was conducted in November and December using traditional surveyed locations and methods. Because of aircraft mechanical problems and weather, the January survey was delayed and then cut short by icy weather that persisted until the end of January. January survey data do not include Toledo Bend, but do include an additional unit of Red River NWR, which was added to the survey. Consequently, those data are not directly comparable to November and December surveys. Counts for November, December and January, were 18,200, 12,200, and 13,500 respectively. The most abundant species in November and December were gadwall and canvasback followed by pintails and mallards in November, and ring-necked duck and green-winged teal in December. The largest numbers of birds in both months were counted at Toledo Bend, the Red River near locks 4 and 5, and managed

impoundments near Loggy Bayou. The large decline in ducks between the November and December surveys was primarily due to big reductions in gadwalls (3,830 to 100) and mallards (1,283 to 87) seen at Toledo Bend. In January, the most abundant species were gadwall, ring-necked duck, mallard, and green-winged teal, and the highest counts came from the Lower Cane unit of Red River NWR, the Yates Tract of Red River NWR, and the Red River south of Lock 4. The January count of 13,500 is higher than last year's 12,500, but is below the average of 14,100 since 2005; however the effect of missing Toledo Bend and adding the Lower Kane Unit of Red River NWR to the survey cannot be assessed.

In NE Louisiana, the traditional cruise survey of selected habitats standardized in 2005 was conducted in November, December, and January, but because of weather, the November survey was incomplete. Although incomplete, 156,000 ducks and 253,000 geese (85% snows) were counted during the November survey with large concentrations of both ducks and geese seen in the agricultural fields near Bunkie and Grand Cote NWR, and from Bonita to Mer Rouge, with large flocks of geese noted further east. In December, 183,000 ducks and 167,000 geese (88% snows) were counted on the complete survey. This is the second highest number of ducks on this survey since 2005 behind the 271,000 counted in 2012. Gadwall (53,000), green-winged teal (52,000), and mallard (25,000) were the most abundant species and large concentrations were noted between Bonita and Mer Rouge, at Catahoula NWR, Bussy Brake, and in Concordia Parish between Vidalia and Monterey. There was widespread ice coverage in agricultural fields during the January survey, and 160,000 ducks and 112,000 geese (84% snows) were counted in the same habitats. This was substantially lower than last January's count of 240,000 ducks, which was the highest since 2005, and is slightly lower than the 10-year average of 173,000. The goose count is about the same as last year, but is 25% below the 10-year average. Mallard (55,000), pintail (33,000), and canvasback (20,000) were the most abundant species, and large numbers were counted at Catahoula NWR, Wham Brake, and Concordia Parish south of Vidalia.

Despite ice-cover in many flooded field and marshes during this survey, habitat conditions across the state remain good. Water levels from winter storms and tides were low in tidally-affected habitats across most of the coastal marsh during the survey, but otherwise water levels were excellent for foraging waterfowl and submerged aquatic vegetation was still evident in many areas. Flooded agricultural habitat appeared to have declined slightly in SW Louisiana due to below-normal precipitation in December and was about average in central and NE Louisiana. Water-level at Catahoula Lake was still above target level but falling, and habitat conditions there were expected to remain good through the end of the East Zone hunting season.