

**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. 16-18  
Catahoula Lake: Dec. 10  
NW: Dec. 11, NE: Dec. 10  
Scaup: Dec. 8

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	106,000	5,000	2,000	113,000
MOTTLED	24,000	27,000		51,000
GADWALL	800,000	541,000	1,000	1,342,000
WIGEON	8,000	11,000	**	19,000
GW TEAL	395,000	114,000		509,000
BW TEAL	33,000	30,000	**	63,000
SHOVELER	185,000	33,000		218,000
PINTAIL	44,000	59,000	5,000	108,000
<b>TOTAL DABLERS</b>	<b>1,595,000</b>	<b>820,000</b>	<b>8,000</b>	<b>2,423,000</b>
SCAUP	24,000	152,000	**	176,000
RINGNECKED	60,000	465,000	26,000	551,000
CANVASBACK	4,000	2,000	48,000	54,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>88,000</b>	<b>619,000</b>	<b>74,000</b>	<b>781,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,683,000</b>	<b>1,439,000</b>	<b>82,000</b>	<b>3,204,000</b>
COOTS	510,000	787,000		1,297,000

\*\*Estimate is less than 1,000

**COMMENTS:**

The estimate of 3.20 million ducks from this survey is very similar to November's estimate of 3.13 million, 64% higher than last December's estimate of 1.95 million, 45% higher than the most recent 5-

year average of 2.2 million and 28% higher than the long-term average of 2.5 million. It is the highest December survey estimate since 1999, when over 4 million ducks were estimated on the same surveyed areas. Estimates for mallard, gadwall, green-winged teal, shoveler, scaup, and canvasback increased from November, while blue-winged teal, pintail, and ring-necked duck declined. Estimates for mottled ducks and wigeon were about the same in November and December. Increases from November in greenwings (+283,000), gadwalls (+200,000), and mallards (+93,000) more than balanced the big declines in pintails (-340,000) and ring-necked ducks (-192,000). The extended warm, dry weather since the November survey seems an unlikely factor, there has been some redistribution of species abundance in the coastal survey area

The relative abundance between southwest and southeast Louisiana was exactly reversed in December. In November, 54% of the ducks were counted in southeast Louisiana, and in December, 54% were counted in southwest Louisiana. That was primarily due to the large decline of ring-necked ducks in southeast Louisiana. Despite that decline from November's very high estimate, the ring-neck duck estimate remains above long-term average, and some of the biggest concentration of ducks in southeast Louisiana were ring-necked ducks seen on transects through Terrebonne Parish marshes. Other concentrations of ducks were noted in the marshes east of Venice, and in the bays of north Breton Sound, where large flocks of scaup were noted both on and off the transect line. In southwest Louisiana, concentrations of ducks were seen north of Johnson's Bayou, in the marshes northeast of Pecan Island, and in flooded agricultural fields northwest of Gueydan. The bulk of the ducks in southwest Louisiana were using marsh habitats, but there was slightly more shallow-flooded habitat in the agricultural region, and more ducks were seen in those habitats than in November. Although not counted on surveyed transects, there was a dramatic increase in the number of both snow and white-fronted geese using agricultural habitats in southwest Louisiana compared to the November survey.

The 82,000 ducks counted at Catahoula Lake on this survey was lower than the 144,000 counted in November and very similar to the 76,000 counted last December. In fact, the composition of this December's count is quite similar to last year when 48,000 canvasbacks, 22,000 ring-necked ducks, and 5,000 dabbling ducks were tallied. This survey was conducted 2 days after the close of the first split of the duck hunting season, and that likely influences the counts compared to past surveys conducted after more than a week of closed season due to 12-day instead of just 5-day splits. The last 2 December counts, including this one and both after only 2 days of closed season, have been much lower than previous years with similar water levels. The combination of lower food production from wetter conditions during the drawdown period and the shorter closed season prior to the survey are likely responsible for the fewer ducks counted on the lake during the December survey period.

Habitat conditions in Louisiana coastal marshes are very good. Water levels in southwest Louisiana marshes were slightly lower than in November but near optimal for feeding waterfowl. Agricultural habitats were slightly improved over November, but conditions are still below average due to lack of rainfall, and managed water is still all that is largely available. In southeast Louisiana, good production of submerged aquatic vegetation was still visible on many transect lines, and water levels are generally good in most areas.

In December and January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Maurepas, Pontchartrain, and Borne, and 53,000 were estimated on this survey. That is 225,000 fewer than last December and 62% below the long-term December average. This is in contrast to the relatively large number of scaup seen along coastal survey transect lines and noted off-line in the open bays of southeast Louisiana.

The NW Louisiana survey was conducted in November and December using traditional surveyed locations and methods. Counts for November and December were 7,900 and 8,900 ducks respectively, which are much lower than the 18,200 and 12,200 seen during last year's surveys. November's count was slightly above the November average, but December's was 13% below average for that month. The most abundant

species in November were gadwall and ring-necked duck, making up 2/3 of the total ducks seen. In December, there was a large decline in ring-necked ducks, and gadwall, mallard, and green-winged teal were the most abundant species, making up over 72% of the ducks counted. In both months, the largest numbers of birds were counted on the Red River near locks 4 and 5, on Grand Bayou Lake, and on managed impoundments near Loggy Bayou.

In NE Louisiana, the traditional cruise survey of selected habitats standardized in 2005 was conducted in November and December. In November, 139,000 ducks and 388,000 geese (85% snow geese) were counted with major concentrations of ducks seen in the flooded agricultural fields south of Grand Cote NWR, east of Ouachita WMA, and between Bonita and Mer Rouge, as well as Duck Lake of Catahoula NWR. Mallard and gadwall were by far the most abundant species, accounting for nearly 60% of the ducks seen. Ring-necked ducks and pintails made up another 30%, but almost all the ring-necks were counted on Duck Lake. This NE survey count is slightly above average since 2005 but lower than the 152,000 ducks counted in November of last year. Concentrations of geese were noted in those same agricultural locations, and the total number of geese on this survey was the highest since the survey was standardized. Habitat conditions across most of the survey area was drier than average with only managed water available in the agricultural regions and little backwater flooding in the major river systems.

In December, the survey crew counted only 104,000 ducks and 78,000 geese (87% snow geese) on the same selected habitats. A nearly 40% reduction in the counts of gadwall and mallard, and an 80% reduction in the number of ring-necked ducks more than offset increases in green-winged teal, shovelers, and pintails on this survey. The largest concentrations of ducks were again seen in the agricultural fields between Bunkie and Grand Cote NWR, between Bonita and Mer Rouge, as well as Delta Farms east of Catahoula Lake. This count is nearly 30% below average since 2005 for December, and continued dry conditions are probably a contributing factor. The large flocks of geese counted in November appear to have moved on, possibly to the coast where increases in geese were noted on the coastal transect survey but not quantified. Concentrations were noted in the agricultural fields of Delta Farms, Bonita/Mer Rouge, near Grand Cote NWR, and south of Ouachita WMA.