

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, January 3-5, 2006,
Catahoula Lake & NE Louisiana,
January 6-7, 2006

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Estimates made from Aircraft (*) Estimate less than 1,000

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	207,000	22,000	4,000	233,000
MOTTLED	32,000	21,000	*	53,000
GADWALL	331,000	194,000	1,000	526,000
WIGEON	4,000	4,000	1,000	9,000
GW TEAL	864,000	57,000	2,000	923,000
BW TEAL	46,000	31,000	*	77,000
SHOVELER	298,000	7,000	*	305,000
PINTAIL	123,000	157,000	55,000	335,000
TOTAL DABLERS	1,905,000	493,000	63,000	2,461,000
SCAUP	13,000	43,000	2,000	58,000
RINGNECKED	54,000	209,000	46,000	309,000
CANVASBACK	*	57,000	68,000	125,000
TOTAL DIVERS	67,000	309,000	116,000	492,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,972,000	802,000	179,000	2,953,000
COOTS	134,000	624,000	1,000	759,000

COMMENTS

The estimate of nearly 3 million ducks recorded on this survey is 15% higher than last month, and 20% higher than the 2.5 million estimated in January of 2005. However, it is 400,000 lower than the past

5-year average of 3.4 million and slightly lower than the long-term average of 3.1 million. Although most species remain at or below long-term average, much higher than average numbers of green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks, and canvasbacks were counted. Large changes in estimates were seen for gadwall and green-winged teal, 2 species with wide distribution across the coastal zone. The estimate for gadwall fell from 880,000 in December to 526,000 in January, while that for green-winged teal increased sharply from 311,000 in December to 923,000 in January. As a follow-up to last month's observations on scaup, we again saw few flocks offshore, and our special survey estimated a new record low of only 571 scaup on Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne including zero seen on Lake Pontchartrain.

There was a big change in distribution of ducks between southwestern and southeastern coastal areas. The estimate for southwest Louisiana went from 910,000 to 1,972,000 between surveys done December 12-13 and this one done January 3-6. Over the same period, the southeast Louisiana estimate fell from 1.5 million to 802,000. Most survey lines showed that pattern (lower counts in southeast, higher in southwest), so the change does not appear to be related to overly large changes in just specific areas. The counts on Catahoula Lake remained very similar to those in December.

Another 137,000 ducks and 206,000 geese (about 15% White-fronted) were counted in selected habitats of northeastern Louisiana. That is more ducks but fewer geese than the 120,000 and 238,000 respectively we counted in December, but those numbers are not directly comparable. Equipment failure kept us from counting 3 areas on this survey that accounted for 26,000 geese and 34,000 ducks in December. Consequently, on the areas counted on both surveys, we saw a similar number of geese and a large increase in ducks in January.

At the time of this survey, habitat conditions remained very dry. Although we reported wet fields in December and anticipated increased available habitat in the agricultural region along the coast, dry weather and much warmer temperatures prevailed. Some fields that showed some flooding in December had actually dried and virtually no new flooding was noted. Some additional managed flooding was seen in northeast Louisiana, but a few fields with water in December had since dried. Virtually no backwater flooding was evident. The only regularly-surveyed location with a marked increase in habitat between the December and January surveys was north of Bunkie, Louisiana where large agricultural acreage had been flooded.