

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
POST OFFICE BOX 98000
BATON ROUGE, LA 70898-9000

Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone, September 11, 13-14, 2006,
Catahoula Lake, September 8, 2006

Reported By: L. Reynolds
R. Helm
S. Smith

September 18, 2006

Pilot: B. Dorsa

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

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD				0
MOTTLED	33,000	9,000	*	42,000
GADWALL				0
WIGEON				0
GW TEAL				0
BW TEAL	295,000	42,000	19,000	356,000
SHOVELER	6,000		*	6,000
PINTAIL	1,000		*	1,000
TOTAL DABLERS	335,000	51,000	19,000	405,000
SCAUP				0
RINGNECKED			*	0
CANVASBACK			*	0
TOTAL DIVERS	0	0	*	*
TOTAL DUCKS	335,000	51,000	19,000	405,000
COOTS				0

COMMENTS

The estimate of 356,000 blue-winged teal is higher than the last September survey (298,000) which was

conducted in 2004. Last year's September waterfowl survey was cancelled due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina which hit southeast Louisiana on August 29, 2005. This year's estimate is also substantially higher than the 20-year average (248,000). The overwhelming majority of blue-wings were counted in SW Louisiana with the largest concentrations found in shallow-flooded agricultural fields. About 60% of the blue-wings counted in SW Louisiana were in agricultural habitats, and 40% were in marsh habitats. The 19,000 blue-wings counted at Catahoula Lake was the largest number seen there since 1999. Three September cool fronts appear to have caused timely teal migrations into our state.

Conversely, the estimate of 42,000 mottled ducks is lower than the 67,000 counted in September of 2004 and the 66,000 seen in 2000, but is similar to the 41,000 seen in 2003 and more than the 20,000 in 2002.

Marsh conditions across the Louisiana coast vary greatly, even over relatively short distances, and show a wide range of recovery from last year's hurricane impacts. Some areas of SW Louisiana, like near Sabine Lake, the west side of the Sabine NWR Pool, and east of White Lake, still appear mostly dead, brown, and with lots of open mudflat. Yet other areas, like south of Sabine Pool and south of White Lake, appear green with good emergent plant growth. Indeed, many locations showed excellent stands of millet, pigweed, sedge and foxtail suggesting good production of annual plant seeds favored by foraging waterfowl. However, few locations in SW Louisiana had good submerged aquatic vegetation.

Although drought conditions have eased with the rainfall of the last 2 months, the water available in the agricultural region was limited mostly to managed areas and second-crop rice. The approximate 32% reduction in planted rice acreage in the surveyed parishes may have also contributed to reduced potential habitat. However, some large concentrations of ducks were seen where agricultural lands held shallow water.

Despite counting relatively few ducks in these areas, the marshes in the upper Terrebonne Basin looked very good, with outstanding submerged aquatic growth, and the marshes in the Atchafalaya Delta, around Delacroix, and at the mouth of the Mississippi River looked much improved from fall of last year. While not super abundant, returning submerged aquatic growth was especially noticeable at Pass-a-Loutre WMA and Delta NWR. Although not on the survey lines, thousands of mottled ducks were seen north of Delta NWR.