

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. 4-6, 2010
Catahoula Lake: Jan. 11, 2010
NW LA: Jan. 8, NE LA: Jan 11-12

January 14, 2010

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	133,000	6,000	1,000	140,000
MOTTLED	52,000	41,000		93,000
GADWALL	355,000	611,000	1,000	967,000
WIGEON	14,000	17,000	**	31,000
GW TEAL	301,000	172,000		473,000
BW TEAL	117,000	59,000		176,000
SHOVELER	230,000	39,000		269,000
PINTAIL	89,000	24,000	**	113,000
TOTAL DABBLERS	1,291,000	969,000	2,000	2,262,000
SCAUP	46,000	135,000		181,000
RINGNECKED	67,000	105,000	18,000	190,000
CANVASBACK	**	23,000	43,000	66,000
TOTAL DIVERS	113,000	263,000	61,000	437,000
TOTAL DUCKS	1,404,000	1,232,000	63,000	2,699,000
COOTS	490,000	1,227,000		1,717,000

**Less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 2.7 million ducks on this survey is 25% higher than the 2.16 million estimated in December and is 69% higher than last January's record low estimate of 1.6 million. It is similar to

the most recent 5-year average (2.67 million) but remains 13% below the 30-year average of 3.1 million ducks. All species except mottled ducks, and pintails increased from the December survey, and estimates for all species are higher than last January. Although lower than in December, the mottled duck estimate of 93,000 is substantially higher than last January's estimate of 57,000 and is higher than the long-term January average of 82,000. Blue-winged teal remain well above the long-term average of 99,000, and the mallard estimate is about 1/3 the long-term average of 410,000 for January. Estimates for gadwalls, shovelers, and ring-necked ducks are above the long-term January average; wigeon, green-winged teal, and pintails were below; and scaup and canvasbacks were similar to the 30-year January average. Increases in gadwalls (656,000 to 967,000), shovelers (141,000 to 269,000) and scaup (74,000 to 191,000) account for much of the difference between the December and January surveys. The count and species composition of ducks on Catahoula Lake was very similar to the 69,000 counted in December and substantially higher than the 3,000 seen last January.

The distribution of ducks was markedly different on this survey compared to December. The estimate for southwest Louisiana was 136,000 lower while that for southeast Louisiana more than doubled from 555,000 to over 1.2 million due primarily to large increases in gadwalls, greenwings, scaup and ring-necked ducks. Many more gadwalls and scaup were seen in the brackish and saline marshes at the southern ends of transects from Terrebonne parish east, and a very large concentration was noted in the fresh marsh south of Lake Salvador. In southwest Louisiana, large groups of birds were seen on Cameron Prairie NWR, and the marshes east from there to Grand Lake. Fewer ducks were seen in the flooded agricultural lands of southwest Louisiana compared to the December survey, although large amounts of shallow-flooded habitat remains available in that region.

One interesting note was a flock of 8-10,000 gadwalls sitting about a mile offshore south of Pecan Island in southwest Louisiana. It is not unusual to see flocks of scaup, sometimes very large flocks, offshore in southwest Louisiana, but seldom have we seen such a large group of gadwalls in that habitat. Survey transects end at the shoreline, so birds seen offshore are not included in population estimates.

Another 238,000 ducks and 214,000 geese (19% white-fronted, 81% snow geese) were counted in selected habitats of northeast Louisiana. That is 33% more ducks and 45% more geese than seen in December. The number of ducks is similar to the 220,000 counted in January 2009, but that is over twice the number of geese seen last year. Ring-necked ducks (60,000), mallards (45,000), and pintails (44,000) were the most abundant species of ducks seen. Large groups of ring-necked ducks were seen on Catahoula NWR (not Catahoula Lake) and Mollicy Farms, and large concentrations of dabbling ducks were noted in the Bonita and Mer Rouge areas and south of Highway 20 east of Bayou Lafourche. Vast expanses of flooded agricultural land were completely ice-covered and ducks were found in large numbers in localized, discrete pockets of open water that were either deeper or apparently kept open by the birds themselves. The largest concentrations of geese were seen in these same areas and in the agricultural areas between Grand Cote NWR and Bunkie.

An additional 9,600 ducks were counted in northwest Louisiana, primarily on the locks, lakes, oxbows, and fields along the Red River and upper Toledo Bend Reservoir. This is substantially fewer than the 14,000 counted in December and is the lowest January count for this region in the past 5 years. Mallards (3,000), gadwalls (3,000), and ring-necked ducks (2,000) were the most abundant species with the largest numbers seen on managed shallow impoundments near Loggy Bayou and between Locks 4 and 5 along the Red River.

In January, LDWF conducts a scaup survey on Lakes Pontchartrain and Borgne. An estimated 64,000 scaup were seen, with 63,000 tallied on Lake Pontchartrain. This is far lower than the 276,000 estimated on the December survey, but higher than the past 2 January scaup surveys of 7,500 in 2009 and 14,000 in 2008. On this survey, scaup were fairly evenly distributed among all transects on Lake Pontchartrain.

Continued rainfall through December has maintained flooded habitat across Louisiana from those last reported. Extremely cold temperatures caused widespread freezing of wetland habitats across the entire state all the way to the coast during the course of this survey, notably between the dates of the coastal transects and the NW and NE surveys. Water levels in most of the marshes of southwest Louisiana remain very high, but in the tidal areas, north winds and low tides created much lower water levels, especially in southeast Louisiana. With lower water levels, more submerged aquatic vegetation was visible and it appears that habitat conditions remain good along the coast. In central and northeast Louisiana, the distribution of ducks on this survey was highly localized due to extensive frozen water, but above-average habitat conditions remain.