Western Canada Cooperative Waterfowl Banding Program

Yorkton, Saskatchewan
2019

Personnel
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Jessi Tapp (Crew Member), Missouri Department of Conservation

Abstract
Eleven to twenty-eight traps were run every night beginning August 4th through August 26th during our stay in Yorkton, with a total of 479 trap nights. The Yorkton crew banded a total of 2501 new birds. A total of 9 species were encountered this trapping season.

Blue-winged Teal were the most encountered species, with a total of 1422 new birds banded accounting for 57% of the total. The second most encountered species were Mallards, with a total of 1038 new birds accounting for 42% of total birds banded. The remaining 1% consisted
of small numbers of redhead, American Green-winged teal, wood duck, northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall and one mallard/black duck hybrid.

**Introduction**

The Yorkton Banding Station is part of the Western Canada Cooperative Waterfowl Banding Program, a long-term, large scale, pre-season waterfowl banding program. This program is a joint effort between the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service, state and provincial wildlife management agencies, the Flyway Councils, First Nations, and non-governmental waterfowl advocacy and research organizations. The Yorkton Station has been staffed by the Mississippi Flyway Council states for decades. The banding data has increased our knowledge of waterfowl population dynamics and have helped inform management decisions.

**Study Area**

The study area is located near the town of Yorkton in southeastern Saskatchewan, Canada. Most historical trap locations are within 15 miles of town center. The trapping locations utilized in 2019 encompassed a loop surrounding Yorkton of approximately 150 miles. Listed below in the appendix are trap sites utilized in 2019 (Table 1) and a map of trap locations (Figure 1).

The habitat surrounding Yorkton is a mixture of native prairie, wetlands, small woodlots, and agricultural fields, with the latter making up the largest component. This area is collectively known as the prairie pothole region. Historically, it has been, and continues to be one of the most vital areas for breeding waterfowl in North America.

**Methods**

The 2019 banding crew arrived in Yorkton on July 28th and began scouting banding sites the first day. The crew baited and set traps on July 29th – August 3rd. Traps were then closed and set on August 3rd, and the first birds were banded on August 4th.

Habitat conditions continued their drying trend that began in 2017. Conditions were much drier in 2019, with several trapping sites abandoned or moved to different locations than 2018. Permanent water bodies were the only available sites for banding.
We placed between two to nine Benning II style traps at each of eight trap locations. Traps were set throughout the entire 23-day trapping season. Multiple adjustments were made to traps throughout the season due to loss of water and to prevent predation. We opened and closed traps at various times to deter predation and also ran one trap at night until the wetland dried up.

Results
A total of 2501 ducks were banded in 479 trap nights. We also had 27 foreign recaptures throughout the trapping season. One drake mallard recapture was banded as an adult in 2006. A total of 9 species were banded that included blue winged teal, mallard, redhead, green-winged teal, wood duck, wigeon, northern pintail, gadwall, and mallard/black duck hybrid cross. Blue-winged teal were the predominant species banded followed by mallards. Sex and age composition data of the banded birds are summarized in the appendix. (Table 3)

The original Leech Bait Pad site was dry so we moved farther into the lake. This proved to be beneficial as it was the most productive site. This area has been productive for the last four years, although habitat conditions and species vary from year to year. Refer to Table 4 in the appendix for a breakdown of species banded by location.

Discussion
The 2019 trapping season was challenging due to the weather and drying wetlands. Warm weather and lack of precipitation had us moving traps often. We finally settled on 27 traps at 6 locations on August 16th. The majority of the trapping season was conducted with pleasant weather conditions; minimal rain and comfortable temperatures between 50°F and 82°F. The other challenges this trapping season: lots and lots of mud, loss of access, and predation from raccoons and mink.
Bird response to traps varied by site, possibly due to the drying conditions. Upon arrival and over the first few scouting days, concentrations of ducks were hard to find. Bait pads were placed at the traditional sites from 2018. Aerial reconnaissance with Mark Koneff from the Fish and Wildlife Service on August 7th confirmed there were no significant concentration of ducks in the area and we were trapping the best locations. Trapping success started slowly and peaked on August 16th through the 19th. Only one extremely good day of trapping blue-winged teal occurred this year on August 17th. Mallard trapping started slowly peaking August 21st – 23rd, with catches of near 100 three straight days.

This was the second year in a row that the Yorkton crew has exceeded 1000 mallards banded. This may be correlated to the smaller wetlands drying up and forcing mallard populations to concentrate on the more permanent wetlands. Yorkton has always been a hotbed for banding blue-wing teal, but with the shrinking wetlands, the lack of teal was surprising. Considering the conditions and receding waterlines on the permanent wetlands, we had great success this banding season!
Table 1. Species totals and composition.

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<th>Species</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Composition (%)</th>
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Table 2. Species, sex, and age breakdown of newly banded birds.

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Table 3. Number of birds banded of each species by location.

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