

**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES**  
**POST OFFICE BOX 98000**  
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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. 3-5  
Catahoula Lake: Jan 4  
NW: Jan. 11, NE: Jan. 4  
Scaup: Jan. 6

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Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	22,000	1,000	**	23,000
MOTTLED	10,000	13,000		23,000
GADWALL	251,000	90,000	**	341,000
WIGEON	**	**		**
GW TEAL	200,000	68,000		268,000
BW TEAL	160,000	72,000		232,000
SHOVELER	133,000	6,000	**	139,000
PINTAIL	67,000	30,000	**	97,000
<b>TOTAL DABLERS</b>	<b>843,000</b>	<b>280,000</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>1,123,000</b>
SCAUP	122,000	311,000	8,000	441,000
RINGNECKED	39,000	294,000	**	333,000
CANVASBACK	93,000	34,000	30,000	157,000
<b>TOTAL DIVERS</b>	<b>254,000</b>	<b>639,000</b>	<b>38,000</b>	<b>931,000</b>
<b>TOTAL DUCKS</b>	<b>1,097,000</b>	<b>919,000</b>	<b>38,000</b>	<b>2,054,000</b>
COOTS	66,000	902,000	1,000	969,000

\*\* Estimate is less than 1,000.

**COMMENTS:**

The January 2022 estimate of 2.1 million ducks in the coastal region (*Figure 1*) and Catahoula Lake represents a 43% increase from December (1.4 million) and a 4% increase from the January 2021 (2 million) estimate. However, this is a decline from the most recent 5-year (-9%) and 10-year (-16%) January averages, and is 28% below the long-term (1978-2021) average of 2.9 million (*Figure 2*).

Most of the increase in total ducks from December is from scaup, which increased from 37,000 to 441,000. There was also a large increase in ring-necked duck (178,000 to 333,000) and green-winged teal (185,000 to 268,000). Gadwall, mallard, and wigeon all declined from December estimates and current estimates represent the lowest January count on record for these species. Pintail also declined, due largely to the absence of the 93,000 that were counted on Catahoula Lake a month earlier. The increase in blue-winged teal represents the second largest January count for this species, eclipsed only by the 2007 estimate (424,000), and is 131% above the long-term average. The three diver species enumerated in these reports are all well above their January long-term averages also: ring-necked duck (+107%), scaup (+90%), and canvasback (+89%). All other species are below their long-term averages.

### **Southwest – 1,097,000**

The duck estimate for southwest Louisiana (*Figure 3*) increased 26% from December, but is 17% below last January's estimate (1.3 million), and lower than the most recent 5-year (1.47 million) and 10-year (1.5 million) averages for SW. Though there were declines in mallard, gadwall, and pintail, mottled duck estimates remained unchanged and all other species increased, driven largely by divers (*Figure 4*). The biggest change was seen with scaup which increased to 122,000 from an estimate of 9,000 in both December and November. There were also 93,000 canvasbacks, up from 15,000 in December and none were observed in November.

There were slightly more ducks west of Calcasieu Lake compared to December, including agricultural fields and pasture north of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. A few thousand snow geese were also observed in marsh adjacent to the shoreline. East of Calcasieu Lake, duck distribution shifted since the December survey. Concentrations declined in the marshes west of Grand Lake but increased in and around White Lake, Pecan Island, and the agricultural lands from Lake Arthur to Kaplan. Scattered flocks of geese were observed in these same ag. fields, with most numbering only a few hundred. Only one goose flock observed while traveling on and between transects was made up of more than 1,000 birds. The large flock of black-bellied whistling ducks noted near Lake Arthur in December, was again seen and estimated at 6,000.

Decent amounts of submerged aquatic vegetation could still be seen from the air in many of the fresh and intermediate marshes. Region-wide, agricultural fields had slightly more water than December but again much of it was either in crawfish production or very shallow in fields with substantial standing crop residue. A low tide again likely affected duck abundance in brackish and saline marshes.

### **Southeast – 919,000**

Southeastern marshes saw a 209% increase in ducks from December's 20-year low (*Figure 3*). This is 54% higher than last January (598,000), 25% higher than the most recent 5-year (735,000), and equal to the most recent 10-year January averages. Divers also drove the increase from December counts in SE (*Figure 5*). Scaup increased from 16,000 to 311,000 and ring-necked ducks from 63,000 to 294,000. Blue-winged teal showed increased numbers from December and were also more abundant than the November survey.

All regions of the SE marshes had increased duck abundance and species composition. The mouth of the Mississippi River was once again the stronghold of duck abundance in SE. Though not enumerated in this report, substantial numbers of bufflehead and common goldeneye were also observed in multiple locations throughout the southeastern coast.

Habitat conditions seem to be stabilizing in SE Louisiana. Though much of the marsh in both Terrebonne and Barataria Bays was disturbed as a result of Hurricane Ida, turbidity appears to have declined. Additionally, some interior marshes, especially between Lafitte and Galliano, have large

sections of marsh vegetation with intact roots and soil that were washed in from farther out that may take root in the coming growing season. Like SW, low tide during the survey in SE Louisiana was observed in brackish and saline marsh.

### **Catahoula Lake – 38,000**

Unlike the coastal transects which were surveyed during the West Zone's second split, Catahoula Lake, similar to past January surveys, had an open season during the survey. Flown in the afternoon to minimize disturbance to the hunting public, there was still a moderate amount of activity on the Lake. The November and December surveys are conducted while the duck season is closed, consequently the 38,000 ducks observed on the lake (79% of which were canvasbacks) was the lowest count of the 2021-2022 season (*Figure 3*). This is 22% lower than last January's count and well below the most recent 5-year (81,000) and 10-year (73,000) January averages. No appreciable number of dabbling ducks was observed and all species of divers had decreased from their December totals. The lake level at the time of the survey was 29.3 MSL (center of the lake) which resulted in suitable shallow water conditions for dabbling ducks along the lake margin. There were an additional 4,000 dabblers, consisting of mallard, pintail, and a smaller number of gadwall and shovelers on the Duck Lake tract of Catahoula NWR, in addition to a flock of 5,000 divers, made up of canvasback and scaup.

### **Northeast**

Dry conditions persisted throughout the NE. Observers indicated that there was likely less water on the landscape than the December survey flown three weeks earlier. The total duck count for NE dropped to 34,000. Pintail and shoveler were the most abundant, followed by green-winged teal, mallard, scaup, gadwall, and canvasback. Nearly half the ducks counted (15,000) were located in agricultural fields around Bunkie with much smaller concentrations located near Bonita-Mer Rouge (3,000), Saline Farms (2,000), and between Highway 133 and Bayou LaFourche (2,000).

An additional 120,000 lesser snow and Ross's geese were counted along with 10,000 white-fronted geese. Geese were also concentrated in the ag. fields around Bunkie, Hebert, and the Bonita-Mer Rouge area. These three locations combined to hold 95% of the geese counted in the region.

### **Northwest**

15,000 ducks were counted on managed impoundments, reservoirs, and agricultural areas in NW Louisiana. Though indications and observations were that NW was as dry or more so than NE, duck abundance increased from the December survey when 10,000 ducks were observed. Gadwall, canvasback, and ring-necked ducks were the most common species observed, followed by shovelers and green-winged teal which numbered more than 1,000. The majority of ducks were again seen in the wetlands, backwater, and river between lock 4 and Shreveport. Multiple, public and privately managed impoundments between Lake Bistineau, Bayou Pierre WMA, and the Yates tract of Red River NWR also contained decent numbers of both dabbling and diving ducks. Both Caddo and Cross Lakes each had over 1,000 canvasbacks but few other species. A few thousand light geese (lesser snow and Ross's) were also counted at the Lower Cane unit of RRNWR and privately managed impoundments. Less than 200 Canada geese were also observed region-wide.

## Lake Pontchartrain, Borgne, Maurepas – Scaup

The scaup estimate for Lakes Borgne (29,000), Pontchartrain (45), and Maurepas (7) were all declines from December estimates. Scaup on Lake Borgne remain above the 5, 10, and 20-year averages for January; however, the estimate of 45 scaup on Lake Pontchartrain is the second lowest since January 2006 when no scaup were observed. There have not been more than 50 scaup on Lake Maurepas since 2013 in either December or January, and nearly half of those surveys resulted in zero scaup counted.

Many parts of Louisiana experienced abnormally warm weather in the last weeks of December 2021. Near-record high temperatures were widespread with records being broken in a few locations. Coastally, high temperatures in the 80's with lows in mid-60's or even 70's were seen from Vinton to New Orleans, with winds being predominantly from the south. A winter storm in the middle part of the country occurred the first week of January 2022, when the coastal portion of this survey was flown. Louisiana saw a brief drop to more seasonal lows in the 30's for a few days, which have not persisted at the writing of this report. This same general weather trend for the holiday weeks was experienced in Alexandria, Shreveport, and Monroe, with highs and lows that were only slightly less than those on the coast.

Similar to the coastal region, precipitation was spotty in north Louisiana, where it was desperately needed, as many impoundments, bottomlands and ag. fields remain dry. Little to no accumulation occurred in most of the region aside from the central part of the state where no more than 3 inches of rainfall have been achieved since the December surveys.



*Figure 1.* Location of 27 transect lines (SW=yellow; SE=red) flown in September, November, December, and January to estimate duck abundance, species composition, and relative habitat use in coastal Louisiana.

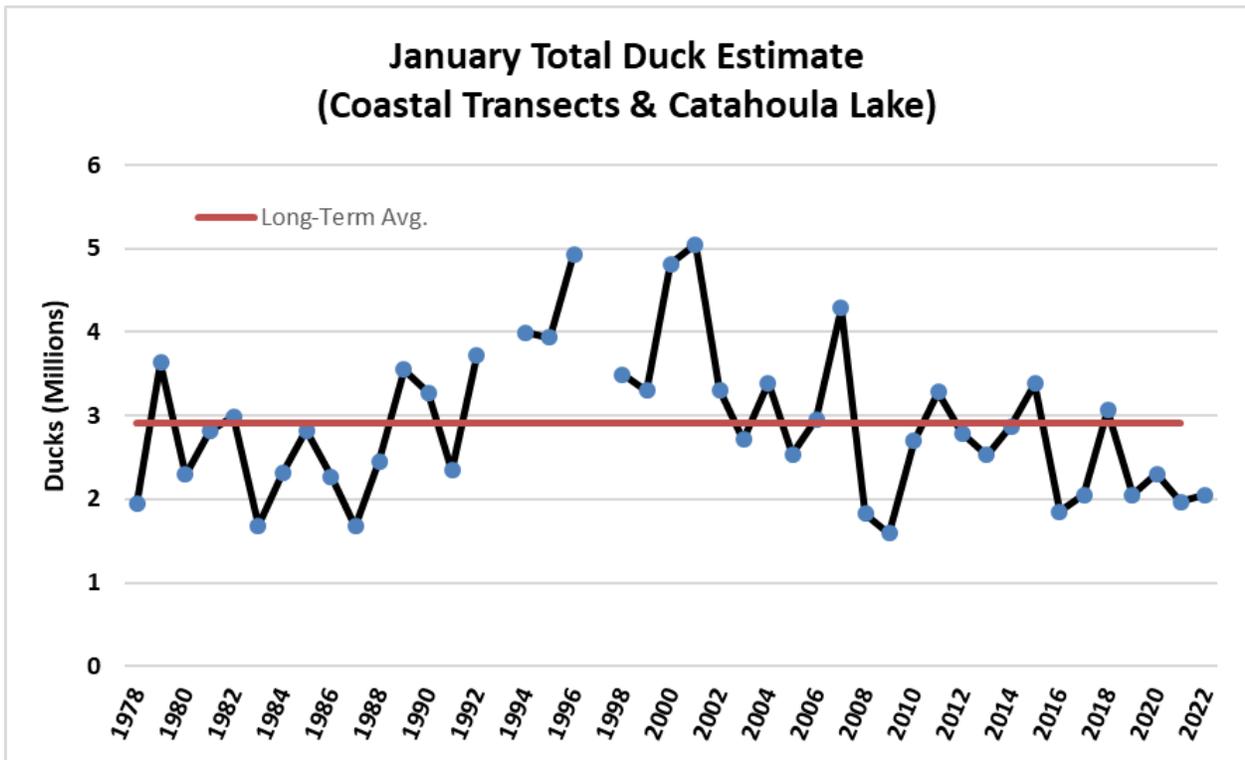


Figure 2. Estimates of all ducks in surveyed area of coastal Louisiana and Catahoula Lake in January 1978-2022. Survey was not completed where there are no values.

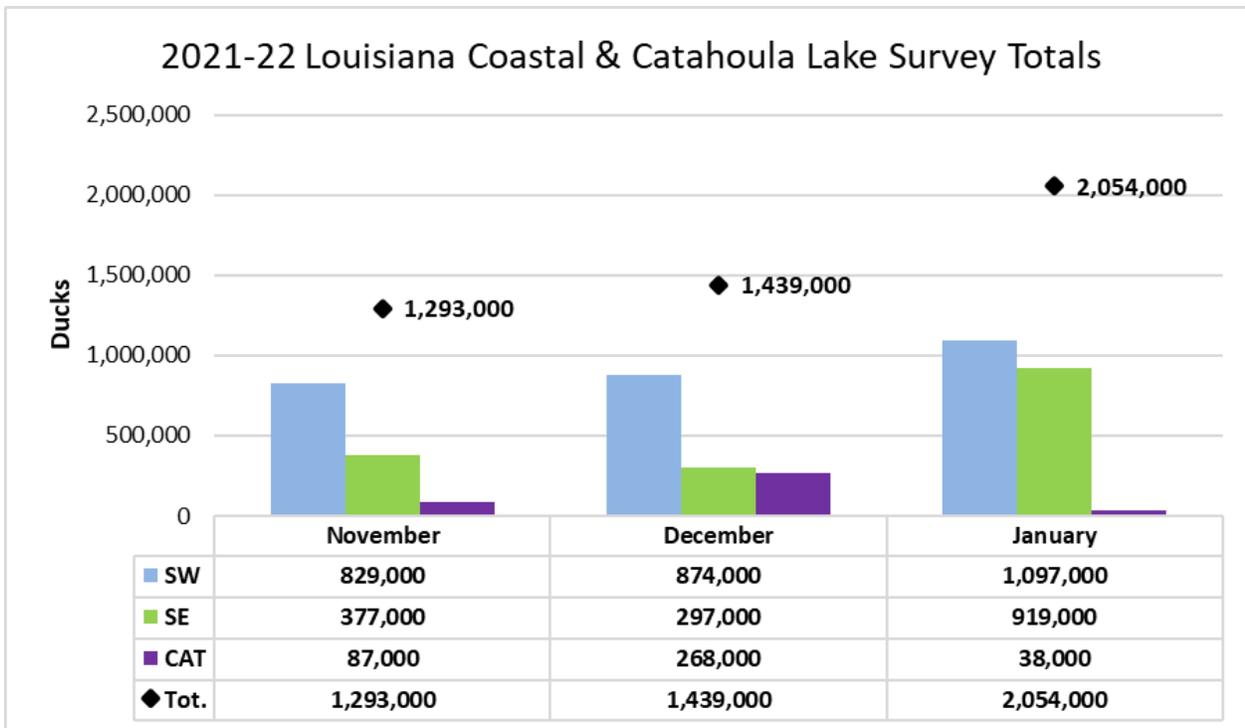


Figure 3. Monthly Regional and Total duck estimate for the 2021-2022 Coastal Aerial Waterfowl Surveys.

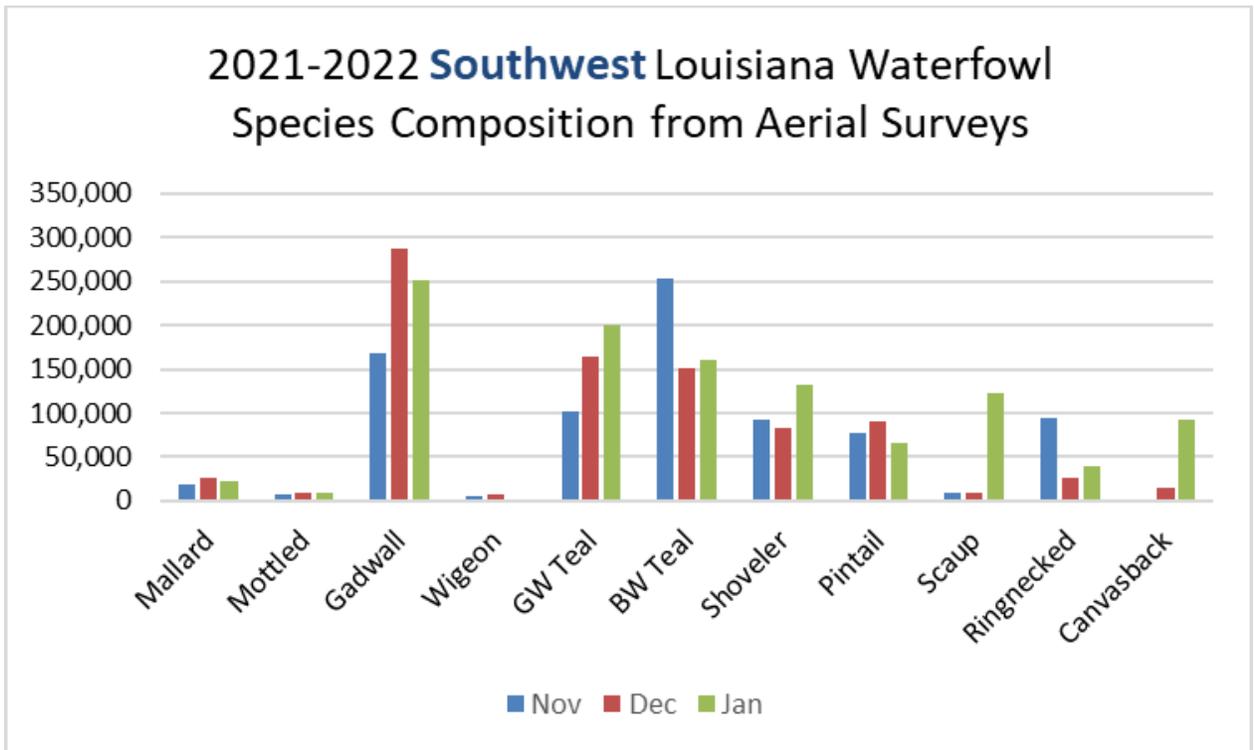


Figure 4. Monthly Duck Species Composition for SW Louisiana.

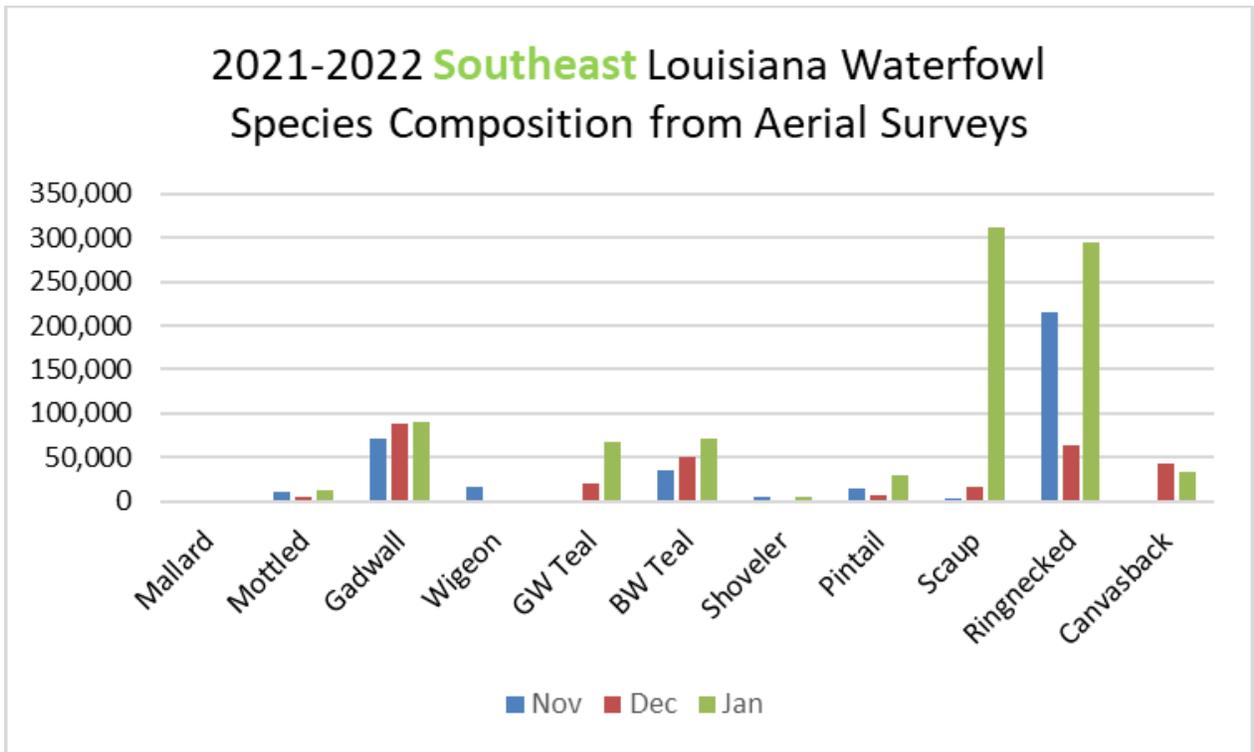


Figure 5. Monthly Duck Species Composition for SE Louisiana