

September 12th, 2018 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

Those fickle blue-winged teal! They left us for the most part along the Illinois River. The remnants of Tropical Storm Gordon on September 7th and 8th increased water levels along the Illinois River. All that water coupled with the cool north winds and rain forced out our blue-winged teal on opening weekend of teal season. Similarly, recent rains across the upper Midwest have the central Mississippi River above flood stage or higher. Blue-winged teal numbers (7,715 ducks) this week were down 62% from the 10-yr average and decreased 60% from last week along the Illinois River. Blue-winged teal (8,565) on the central Mississippi River were up 95% from the 10-yr and 108% from last week; however, the majority of the teal were using the shallow waters of Swan Lake at Two Rivers NWR near the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. Many of our refuges along the Illinois River held out the devastating flooding and the duck food plants were spared; but the Mississippi River was not so fortunate. Many of the refuges along the Mississippi lost their moist-soil plants from New Boston to Grafton and only the areas behind major levees remain intact.

Blue-winged teal (*Spatula discors*) prefer to feed on the sloppy mudded areas along our rivers and wetlands. Water more than a couple inches deep sends them packing for shallower foraging sites. This is why the recent rains have caused our picky bluewings to head further south. The cooler weather did bring in a few more of the early migrants like northern pintail, northern shoveler, and green-winged teal. See if you can identify them in the photo below.

Good luck hunting out there! For more information about the waterfowl survey, check out our webpage at www.bellrose.org. Stay tuned for more updates next week.....





Photos 1-2. Blue-winged teal in breeding plumage taken last spring by Ryan Askren. Note the beautiful plumage of the males while adorning their nuptial plumage. During summer/autumn migration, the plumage of males resembles that of the cryptically colored females.

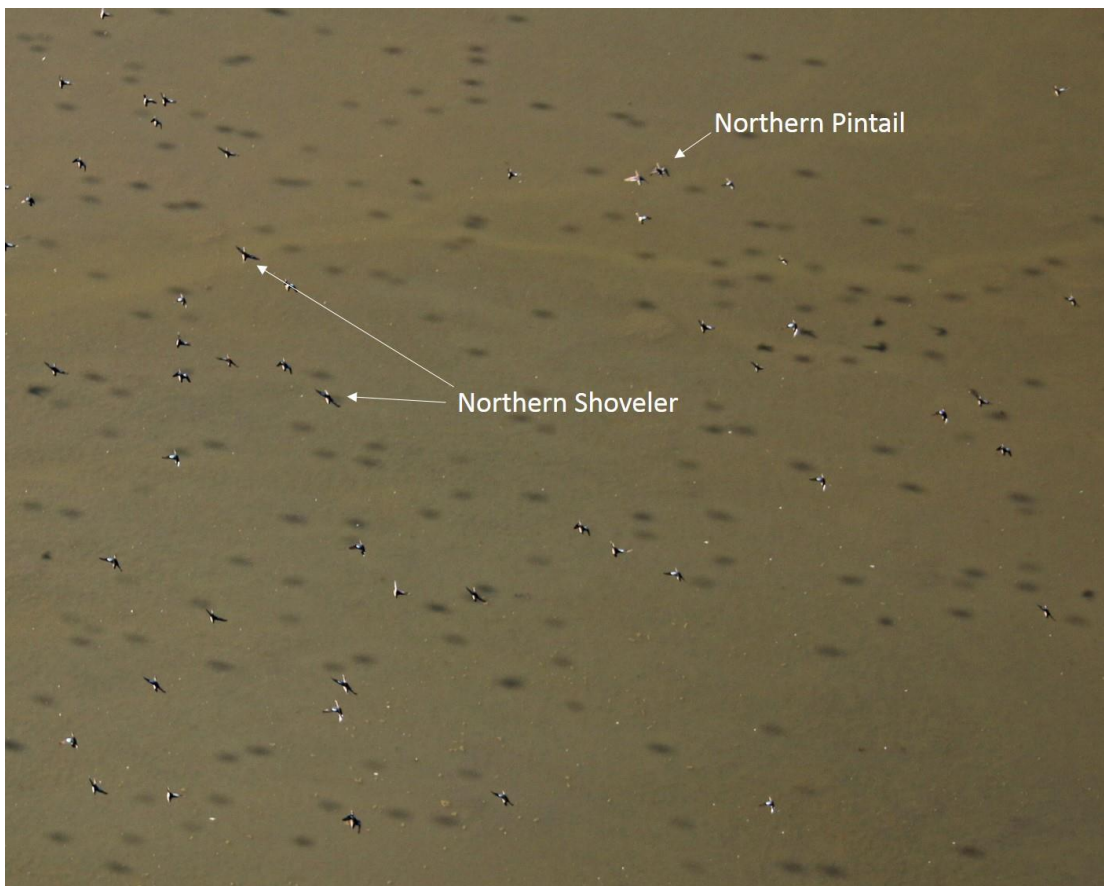


Photo 2. A photo blue-winged teal from the plane with a few intermixed northern pintail and northern shoveler.



Photo 3. Mississippi River flood waters ravaging a duck blind just south of Oquawka, Illinois on September 12, 2018. Hopefully, these hunters will have time to rebuild the blind before duck season begins in late October!