

December 8th, 2017 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We flew the waterfowl inventory on Thursday, December 7th and Brrrrr.....is it getting cold. Ice was forming on many of the refuges along both the Illinois and Mississippi rivers; however, we started running out of ice down around the Grafton area. Total ducks remained 6.5% above average for early December when we counted 218,600 ducks on the Illinois River, and ducks (520,880) were 24.5% above average on the Mississippi River. However, both the Illinois (32.4%) and Mississippi (29.2%) were down from last week's estimates. I was hopeful this cold snap would push the last of the mallards into Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, but after yesterday's flight, it appeared as though our mallard numbers have already peaked, and we are on the downhill slide. Mallards (133,210) on the Illinois dropped 23.1% from last week; likewise, mallards (262,460) on the Mississippi River were down 34.8%. Although the duck numbers have declined, I am hopeful that the mallard hunters will enjoy some success as our refuges start to freeze; time will tell I guess.

Last week I had a few requests for aerial views of different species of waterfowl. The 1st photo depicts loafing mallards and their tendency to colonize a shoreline and soak up the sun. The 2nd shot portrays what mallards and American green-winged teal do in flooded timber. The 3rd image contains an assortment of species but illustrates what foraging ducks (especially green-winged teal) look like in newly flooded moist-soil vegetation. The dense group on the shoreline is primarily green-winged teal with a few mallards, northern pintail, and Canada geese in the mix. The 4th photo reveals the even spacing of a flock of ring-necked ducks; note their black appearance from the aerial perspective. Similar to the ringnecks, greater white-fronted geese (5th photo) evenly space themselves when loafing on the ice or water. This characteristic is much different from the usual Canada goose behavior depicted in the 3rd photo. I hope you enjoy the aerial photographs! For more information about the waterfowl survey, check out our webpage at www.bellrose.org. Stay tuned for more updates next week.....





