

December 2nd, 2016 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We completed the waterfowl survey on Tuesday, November 29th following the arrival of new ducks into Illinois over Thanksgiving. Duck numbers (301,955) on the Illinois River were up 6% from last week and 38% above average for the last of November. Most of the increase was due to the arrival of some mallards which now stand at 127,915 birds; however, mallard numbers were below (24%) normal on the Illinois River. An even larger movement of mallards landed in the central Mississippi River region which were up 94% from last week and totaled 222,095 mallards. This mallard estimate was right at the 10-yr average. Total duck abundance for the Mississippi was 623,160; up 33% from last week and 50% above average for late November.

I was asked several times after the survey numbers were posted why hunter success was down. Specifically, one question was “How can duck hunting be slow if we have almost a million ducks between the two river systems”? I replied that our mallard numbers were currently average for the central Mississippi, but still 24% below average on the Illinois. We all know Mallards are “King” when it comes to duck hunting in Illinois, and mallards drive the harvest rate and duck hunter satisfaction in Illinois. So when mallard numbers are average or below, hunter success and satisfaction will be down. Further, I believe most of the other ducks have been here for at least a couple of weeks and many for about a month. The majority of the ducks have figured out where to avoid gunning pressure. Additionally, our mallards have started feeding late in the afternoon and into the night. I have heard multiple reports of mallards moving from refuges to the duck clubs at sunset to avoid hunting pressure. One of my colleagues joked that we have turned them into bats, forcing the ducks to feed at night to get a reprieve from the duck hunters. Hopefully, the weather system coming across the prairies this weekend (Dec. 2nd) will bring us more of those “prized” greenheads. Time will tell I guess.

For more information on the waterfowl surveys, check out our web page at www.bellrose.org Stay tuned for more updates next week.....

The attached photo from November 29th depicts several thousand American green-winged teal and northern pintails foraging in some shallowly flooded moist-soil vegetation. In fact, you can see the muddy water where the birds were feeding at the water-vegetation interface. Enjoy!

