

December 20, 2018 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We flew the waterfowl survey on Monday, December 17th. We hit the big thaw, Again! Most of the surveyed areas below Henry, IL and Burlington, IA had ample amounts of open water. Duck numbers (116,830) on the Illinois River were very similar to the previous week. In fact, there was slight increase from December 11th, which is likely due to the thaw and the birds spreading out across the landscape. The Mississippi River was a different story. I witnessed a big reduction in the duck numbers this week especially on the lower Mississippi River above Grafton, IL. I estimated 192,590 ducks, down from the 492,000 ducks we counted on December 11th. However, the ground counts at various refuges did not see such a drastic decline. I'm not exactly sure what is going on, but we will find out late next week when we get passed the Christmas Holiday.

We had a small Holiday celebration at my office on Thursday, December 20th. This year we decided to have a blind taste test of various waterbirds. Our species list included Canada goose, snow goose, northern pintail, wood duck, mallard, gadwall, canvasback, American coot, bufflehead, common goldeneye, and common merganser. Yes, mergansers! We cut the bird breasts into small nuggets about the size of your little finger and fried them in Andy's Yellow Fish Breeding. To our surprise, Canada goose was the unanimous favorite with a score of 5 (1-5 scale with 1 poor and 5 best). In a 3-way tie for second place (score 4) were northern pintail, wood duck, and mallard. Gadwall, canvasback, and American coot ranked in the middle of the pack (score 3). Bufflehead, snow goose, common goldeneye were ranked low (score 2). And, the overall least desirable bird was the common merganser (score 1). It was funny to watch the reaction of the staff when they tasted the merganser. My own comment after eating the merganser was, strong, edible maybe, definitely not desirable. I guess someone needs to share a better recipe, because I don't plan on shooting any more of them! Happy Holidays!!!!

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

