

November 20th, 2014 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We flew the waterfowl survey of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers on November 20th, and as expected with the arctic plunge, most (91%) of the refuges and survey locations were more than 90% ice-covered. In fact ice conditions along the Illinois River valley (IRV) resembled what is normally seen in late December. My colleague and former aerial survey observer, Michelle Horath, informed me that she started recording ice conditions during the waterfowl survey back in fall 2002. This year is the earliest we have been over 90% ice since monitoring began 13 years ago. Michelle also ran some numbers this week and determined that the peak number of mallards in the IRV over that last 10 years has averaged November 27th. Mallard numbers this week were slightly higher than last week; however, my feeling is that we may be on the backside of the duck abundance curve this fall. Only time will tell. On a brighter note, mallard numbers along the Mississippi River were holding steady, and total duck abundance (497,660) was 43% above the 10-yr average (www.bellrose.org). Diving duck hunters along the Mississippi River should be happy as I estimated over 123,000 canvasbacks this week from Keokuk, IA to Dallas City, IL.

Be safe and happy hunting! Stay tuned for more updates next week.....