

November 15, 2018 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We flew the waterfowl survey on Wednesday, November 14th, just prior to the arrival of the snow storm that dumped several inches of snow in Illinois. Unseasonably cold weather has encompassed the Midwest in the past week freezing most of our shallow wetlands along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. In fact, it was 16° F when we climbed into the airplane on Wednesday morning.

Shortly after take-off as we approached the Rice Lake Complex near Banner, IL, I commented to Mike (my pilot), “They’re Still Here”. The wetlands were >90% frozen on Wednesday morning but the ducks were piled into small open water pockets where the birds were keeping the water from freezing. Flock sizes we observed just kept getting bigger as the morning progressed. We estimated 386,230 ducks on the Illinois River, which was 21% above average; more than 60% of those ducks were mallards (240,390). When we arrived at the southern end of the Mississippi River route, we start finding massive concentrations of ducks. In fact, we estimated nearly 1 million ducks (972,270) along the course of the Mississippi from Grafton to New Boston, IL. This number was 154% greater than average and the 6th highest count on the Mississippi River since 1948. Mallards (606,710) were 314% above average for mid-November and diving ducks (179,865; primarily canvasbacks and ring-necked ducks) were well ahead of schedule.

The weather is supposed to warm up over the next week. Let’s hope the ducks hold on until we thaw out a little!

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



