

# MIGRATION REPORTS – DECEMBER 2016

DECEMBER 08, 2016



**Calling Gadwall  
Duck Creek WMA Missouri**

Brrr i-i-its coooold out there! But a cold day to us Texans is a balmy day in December for the Dakotans. Freezing temperatures will sweep all the way down and knock on Houston's door this coming Friday morning. Sustained freezing temperatures for a number of days will reach down the Central Flyway into Northern Texas. And if you ever had a hankering to escape our summer heat to live up North check out these numbers from Bismarck, North Dakota, Friday low of -17 degrees, that's an actual temperature not a wind chill. The wind chill in some spots, -40 degrees, see if your long-johns can handle that, and come Saturday they add in a few inches of snow and more wind...no thank you sir! As of this weekend snow will cover almost all of North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas will be 50% covered, all good news for us.

A two-front punch with a Polar Vortex spin is triggering a major migration (larger than the last). Waterfowl are on the move and heading our way. The Mid-west is stacking up with Mallards, and to my knowledge this is the earliest this has happened in a while. Good time to head north and shoot some greenheads. Last week there was a 50 / 50 split between mallards and other ducks up north, but it is now predominantly mallards in the duck count. Perhaps a few will trickle down and get of course to THC! Still quite a few pockets of Snow Geese in the Great Plains, but as noted

earlier they are here in numbers not seen in quite sometime. Enjoy the geese, especially when you have a strong wind pounding on the back in a duck blind and the big birds are crawling on the deck!

We received just under 4-inches of rain this past weekend. I don't say this often, but just the right amount, not too much, and too little.

## **DECEMBER 14, 2016**



Across all the Flyways I am hearing the same old song, delayed migration, lackluster has been used more than a few times. In case you are wondering why the duck season never extends past January 31<sup>st</sup> it is written in stone in the government's CFR's and States may not extend duck seasons past that date. The reasoning is that ducks begin to pair up heavily in the month of February and the USFW service does not want to be disruptive to this bonding, called seasonal monogamy, also many ducks are paired earlier, such as Mallards as early as December.

*Per Ducks Unlimited: When a paired bird is harvested by a hunter, its mate must find a suitable replacement. Most waterfowl establish new pair bonds within days or weeks after losing a mate, but the timing of the loss can have an impact on the birds' survival and productivity. In recent studies, female black brant that lost mates during the hunting season subsequently found new ones, but experienced higher mortality than birds that did not lose mates, likely because of a greater vulnerability to harvest and predation during the courtship and pairing process. In*



*another study, researchers used controlled experiments to demonstrate that among female mallards, the loss of a mate in late winter may reduce annual recruitment by as much as 7 percent. The increased time and energy costs associated with finding a new mate were believed to have been responsible for the decreased productivity in these birds. This information is vital to ensure that hunting season dates and lengths are rooted in science and compatible with the reproductive behaviors of waterfowl populations.*

Up north freezing temperatures will be round the clock in Kansas, meaning any waterfowl that needs to feed & roost in shallow wetlands is out-of-there. I had a call from one of our landowners that is working on a natural gas project in South Dakota, "Just a big block of ice up here!" There is a great pocket of snow forming in prime nesting real estate in North Dakota and Southern Canada that bodes well for pintails and bluewings next season. Man the Pintails need some Viagra or something to get their numbers up.

Sand Lake NWR in South Dakota reports they are 100% frozen, all the birds have left, migration is over. In Kansas the waterfowl are now using big water to roost. Cheyenne Bottoms, Kansas, recently received a big wave of 100,000 Snows meaning there are still plenty of geese in pockets of the Mid-west. To the east Squaw Creek, Missouri, reports their wetlands are 95% frozen and their duck and goose numbers are 50% what it was last week. Over in Arkansas Wade Bourne with DU reports significant new birds arriving daily. Also reports that the Arkansas Fish & Game, still very dry and waterfowl are concentrated on private land waters, the WMA's water levels are very low. Today's report from Arkansas' last aerial waterfowl survey reports over 750,000 ducks in the State, up a half-million birds from November! Good news there.

We had a big push of ducks into the Northern Property during the split when the cold weather hit up north. But come the opening day the birds were for the most part gone, thank goodness for our Southern Properties. I suspect the gale-force-winds on Thursday moved the ducks elsewhere. Bluewings are still around, but not in the numbers we saw last season. Black-bellied Tree Ducks are just not in abundance at Thunderbird, but according to Todd Merindino, Regional Gulf Coast Manager for Ducks Unlimited, they are prevalent on many of the WMA's. He speculates that they have migrated out of Louisiana, and for interim have decided to winter along the Coast of Texas as opposed to migrating to the Texas Lower Valley or Mexico. The most common species of duck? Well you name it, one group shot 11 different species of ducks this past Saturday! Now that's a mixed bag.

Shannon Tompkins reports a lot of water on the landscape over on the eastside of town. So much water fell recently that parts of the Anahuac NWR had to be shut down, that can only translate to scattered birds, and Shannon confirms with his brief visit to the area. Up in Eagle Lake, Johnny's Sport Shop reports solid shoots on Green-winged Teal this past Saturday, followed by a string of very spotty hunts ever since then. Waterfowl Biologist Guru, David Lopries who regularly prowls the El Campo area said and I quote, "For the most part you guys seem to be the only ones shooting ducks." He has talked to a number of groups and the reports range from poor hunts to did not even fire a shot. Even the duck haven of Providence City to the west of El Campo is holding few ducks. Believes recent rains dispersed the ducks. Down the coast near the Rockport area James Prince with Shoalwater-Budweiser reports lots of Redheads and just a few Pintails. He said the Redheads came in a mass migration all at once riding in on last week's strong

front, but little else was delivered. He believes other species of ducks will return once the tides / winds produce skinny water for the puddlers to feed in. Hope he is right. Waterfowl have an uncanny ability to find food sources and rain saturated areas overnight.

Ducks appear to be scattering across our area, seeking food and relief from gunning pressure. Full moons almost always impact duck hunting, and we had one last week. We need a good weather mixer to shake things up and south winds should return ducks to the north. Next week Keven Kraai, TP&W Waterfowl Program Leader, David Lobpries, and others strap into puddle-jumpers next week and begin to fly Texas in their annual waterfowl survey. It will be interesting what they find and I will share their survey once it is compiled.

## **DECEMBER 20, 2016**



Boy did ducks and geese migrate in to Thunderbird this past weekend. I said in the last newsletter that we needed something to "stir'm" up, well we got it in a big way.

Up to the north the reports are:

- North Dakota - frozen, few birds
- South Dakota - frozen, few birds
- Nebraska - frozen, few birds
- Missouri - frozen, few birds



- Arkansas - frozen, few birds
- Kansas - frozen, few birds
- Oklahoma - frozen, few birds
- Texas Panhandle - frozen, few birds

Waterfowl can and will move great distances with the right weather and wind currents. Some of the distances are mind-boggling. At the recent Migratory Game Bird Commission meeting last week in Austin, Dr. Bart Ballard, Professor and Research Scientist with Texas A&M and Chairman of the Waterfowl Research at the Caesar Wildlife Institute, shared with us his ongoing research and satellite banding of White-fronted Geese and Sandhill Cranes. As soon as he sends me a few tracking charts I will share them in an upcoming newsletter. Suffice to say birds have moved into Texas in great numbers over the weekend due to the recent front, but at the same time birds can move just as easily out of the area with the right conditions. Things will begin to warm up a little over the weekend and winds will shift around to the south for a few days. All meaning that waterfowl can shoot back up north, at least into the upper Texas as it defrosts. Another cold front hits us Monday morning so temps will remain low across the Northern States. We should still see good numbers of waterfowl along the coast and hopefully birds will move into the prairies to the north.

## **DECEMBER 27, 2016**



Squirrely duck weather with unpredictable mood swings may best describe our weather so far this duck season. Record Christmas high temperatures and sustained south winds may redistribute birds, but with no noticeable heavy rains anywhere to the north of us birds may be reluctant to waste energy on finding new feeding grounds and stay put where they are undisturbed. My prediction is the birds for the most part will not move until the next major weather system hits.

Per Ducks Unlimited, about the same time we got a good push of birds so did our eastern neighbors in Louisiana. "The survey is up 18 percent from the November counts, with an estimated 3.61 million ducks in the state. That's 37 percent higher than last December's estimate and 29 percent higher than the long-term average for December," says Larry Reynolds, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Waterfowl Study Leader.

Both Kansas and Missouri WMA's are all reporting almost 100% frozen wetlands and success rates averaging about 1 bird / hunter /day. The opposite is true on the WMA's along the Texas coast where most are doing quite well, indicating good populations of ducks along the Texas Coast.

Geese are now feeding on green grasses. There are two fairly large concentrations of geese near or on our properties. The first being 10K just to the west of OM. These birds are trading back and forth between the neighbor's property, OM proper, and the OM marsh, especially on windy days that appear to make them move. Harrison also has a respectable population of geese, perhaps 5K. Unfortunately we have to leave the geese alone as there are lots of ducks mixed in with them. Harrison may be the hot property this Saturday.

Bluewings have somewhat filtered out but there is still a fair amount showing up on straps. Gadwalls are not as numerous, and there seems to be an upsurge of greenwings and pintails. Shovelers are holding their own, numerous on the Northern Properties and scattered on the Southern Properties. "Cans" come and go at OM.