



December 16, 2015

To All THC Members:



**A Surreptitious Travis Peterson - after eating crow on floating goose decoys -
"Toby", and Zack Bollinger
36 Birds (24 Ducks & 12 Geese) - Middle Pond**

SECOND SPLIT OPENING WEEKEND RESULTS

For the second opening Saturday of duck season 30 hunters bagged 177 birds for an average of 5.9 birds/gun. The weekend saw 46 hunters shoot 251 birds for an average of 5.5 birds/gun with 9 out of 12 groups shooting limits (75%) on the following ponds; Gadwall, Bear Pond - Rod North (2), Northern Roost, Toby, Nellie, Remington, Middle, and Swale. Looking through all the photographs from the weekend there is preponderance of daggling orange feet, therefore the award for the most commonly bagged duck goes to greater shoveler with a tossup between greenwings and bluewings for second. Bluewings in the middle of December? Just goes to show you how unseasonable warm it is. Gadwalls and pintails were seen in some abundance on our Friday scouting but few made it to the straps. Check out Drew Taggart's video of ducks on the Gadwall Pond this past Saturday @ <https://goo.gl/photos/vAbYdaQooGqJ8g1i6> .

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On Saturday only eight of our twenty-nine duck ponds were hunted (27%), the marsh was not gunned. Our abundance of ponds and duck food should provide solid duck hunting for everyone in the second half. More details on the waterfowl can be read in the Migration Report.



Paul and camoed-up Mary McDonald with a 4-person limit of Ducks from Swale Pond

COMPARISION OF PREVIOUS PAST FIVE YEARS

As predicted earlier, this was indeed a very good second opener. In fact it was the second best since 2010, even edging out the incredible 2012 season. When comparing the second half opening weekends over the past seasons this is how it looks.

2010 - 5.4 bird average - 243 birds - 45 guns
2011 - 6.2 bird average - 290 birds - 47 guns
2012 - 5.4 bird average - 298 birds - 55 guns
2013 - 5.3 bird average - 197 birds - 37 guns
2014 - 2.9 bird average - 161 birds - 56 guns
2015 - 5.5 bird average - 246 birds - 45 guns

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**Tim Harvey, David Tyte, Nick Hardy, & Drew Taggart
24 Ducks - Gadwall Pond**

MIGRATION UPDATE

I was very bullish about the second half, but now some irresolution is settling in my blood. Rest assured we will shoot more birds than almost everyone else, but will they be limits, three-quarter limits, or half-limits on ducks? This has been a very off-season with a downright enigmatic migration. Regardless I will make an attempt to make sense out of what is going on with all those wings flapping around the country.

Middle Coast

The swath of rain that assaulted the middle coast in late October, scattering birds in the process, may now indeed be our friend. Many mid-coast wetlands including the coastal wildlife refuges received a much-needed rain, new ponds were formed and struggling wetlands were recharged. The Mad Island Refuge in Collegeport (just over the bay from OM) averaged 4.5 birds. That is outstanding for a public hunting area. Justin Hurst Refuge a little further to the east averaged 3.2, another very good showing of birds. Up to the north of us the Pierce Ranch (guided hunts) are doing well with guestimate of 85% of their hunters shooting limits on ducks, including a lot of bluewings. It appears our area is the "hot spot" for ducks. However, of concern is what is going on elsewhere and the weather, both elements that will have an unknown impact.

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**Steve Lackey, "Lexi", Glenn Hayes, Steve Brien, Michael Corbett, & "Smoke"
Limits of Ducks from the Bear Pond**

Lower Coast

The lower coast as a whole struggled on ducks this past weekend. Matagorda Island, a waterfowl haven had a high duck hunt of 4-birds per group. A few pintails and bluebills are around, but the vast majority are redheads and they are localized to certain areas. Quite simply ducks have not arrived in this area yet.

Upper Coast

J.D. Murphee Wildlife Refuge had a 2.5 bird average this past weekend with teal and gadwall being the most common ducks. McFaddin Wildlife Refuge along the coast reports an abundance of water and average success similar to Murphee. Anahuac Wildlife Refuge reported the area is flooded, duck numbers are low, and hunting success is poor. It appears rains and flooding have dispersed birds in the wildlife refuges along the Louisiana border.

East Texas

Heavy flooding and birds are scattered. However by finding a localized concentration of birds one can have an outstanding shoot.

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Mid-west

There are still plenty of mourning doves in some areas in the Mid-west. Normally they have vacated the plains for Texas at this time of year. Snow geese are still stacked in various areas of the Mid-west. Kansas reports ducks have partially left the large bodies of water of the wildlife refuges and are scattered across farm ponds, normally frozen at this time of year. Redheads still sit on some of the big waters, another very unusual observation for this time of year.



**Eric Bassett, Andrew Bassett, & Scott Dausat
4-man limits from the Nellie Pond**

Missouri

Ducks may now be peaking in Missouri as of the last report I received. Generally their largest concentrations of ducks occurs in the last week of November, similar to ours, but this year it appears they are peaking right now at 1.3 million birds (normally 0.7 million at this time of year). However, the same as many of our Texas ducks, the birds are scattered throughout the state due to flooding from rains and swollen rivers.

Arkansas

Arkansas reports that all of their waterfowl impoundments are flooded to capacity and subsequently birds are scattered. Per a report I received today from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's latest aerial waterfowl survey; the state's duck population is well below the average and the lowest since 2009. Typically at this time of year there are 750,000 mallards in

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the waterfowl-rich area of the eastern part of the state, but this year the survey counted less than half the amount of mallards. The blame-game points the finger towards a strong *El Niño* weather pattern - remember in one of my previous newsletters I mentioned it would be a good idea to shoot *El Niño*, it still is. The high Christmas Day in Little Rock will be near 70 degrees and they are not alone.



**John Nicolson, "Bo", Travis Peterson, & "Toby"
3-man limits from the Northern Roost Pond**

Weather

Most of Kansas and Oklahoma are snow free, highs will be in the high 40's and low 50's not the best of conditions to push birds to the south. This Saturday's weather at Thunderbird calls for virtually no wind, not ideal. Next week whip out the clubs for 60-70 degree "birdy" chasing golf weather, not very Christmas-like at all.

In summary we have a stalled - perhaps 2-3 weeks, maybe longer - if not greatly dispersed migration of birds. Bluewings are filling straps, unheard in the middle of December. Balmy weather persists throughout the Central Flyway. Abundant water exists everywhere you look. The excessive water looked at another way: You have 200 people living in a town with one local café, filled to the brim with locals, along comes a McDonald's, Chick-fil-A, and Denny's, guess what? Your little old café is no longer wall-to wall. These are all indicators of tough duck hunting conditions, the likes of which we have not seen in over a decade.

Great habitat, an abundance of duck ponds, controlling the hunting pressure and disturbance on the ponds will all help insure we will have birds to shoot through the remainder of the year.

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SECOND HALF WEDNESDAY ROTATION OF PONDS

Wednesday rotation of ponds shall be as follows:

- Northern
 - Toby Pond
 - Nellie Pond
 - Bo Pond
- Rod North (we may hunt two groups if birds / hunter demand dictates such)
 - Bear Pond (south)
 - Hayes Pond (northwest)
 - Mattie Pond (northeast)
 - Smythe Pond (fish)
- Radley
 - Pintail Pond
 - Gadwall Pond
 - Widgeon Pond

If we have an abundance of groups on Wednesday we will open the rest of the Northern property, followed by the Harrison property. In the event additional ponds are opened I will take the time to call everyone to readjust their pond selection. An FYI, for teal season we averaged 3.5 groups on Wednesday and during the first split of duck season we averaged 4.3 groups on Wednesday.



"Toby's Hunting Tie"

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CLARIFICATION OF THE DRAW / RESERVATIONS

Draws are all done with the supervision of at least one club manager. Friday night draws for Saturday hunts will have at least one manager at the lodge. As all of the managers have families and lives outside of Thunderbird there may or may not be a manager at the lodge for the Tuesday or Saturday night draw. If one of the managers is not present the draw will be held remote, generally by Rob or myself. One of my boys usually pulls cards for the groups.

You must **at all times** call in your reservation by 6 pm the day before your hunt, no later, no sooner. Be sure to state whether you have a dog or ATV, and your pond picks, once again do not assume a manager will be at the lodge for the draw. If you have no preference for ponds just state, "Best available." If you state nothing for ponds we will assume it is "best available."

If for some reason you cannot make a scheduled hunt be sure to call the manger of the draw, assuming it is a reasonable hour in the evening. That way we can place a person in your cancelled slot. I.e. You have drawn a hot pond such as Nellie and you tell us you cannot make it, then we have the option of placing another member in a pond with a sure limit.



Middle Pond War Wagon

"We sure could have done without the those 'Stink'n' Floating Goose Decoys, right Travis!"

Best regards, Todd Steele & Paul McDonald

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THUNDERBIRD HUNTING CLUB CALENDER

- February 1 - Notification of yearly dues for 2016 / 2017, deposits due to hold membership
- February 20 (Saturday) - Decoy Pull / Shrimp Pull (Work applies to 2016-2017 season)
- March 1 - Club memberships open to "wait list" and guests on a first come, first serve basis, based on acceptance and deposits



MIGRATORY GAME BIRD HUNTING CALENDER

- December 18 - Opening of Woodcock Season
- December 19 - Opening of South Zone Dove Season (2nd split)
- December 19 - Opening of Zone C (THC leases) Sandhill Crane Season
- December 23 - Closing of Gallinule, Rail, and Moorhen (2nd split)
- January 19 - Closing of South Zone Dove Season (2nd split)
- January 24 - Closing of South Zone Duck Season (2nd split)
- January 24 - Closing of Zone C (THC leases) Sandhill Crane Season
- January 31 - Closing of East Zone Goose (all species)
- January 31 - Closing of Woodcock Season
- February 1 - Opening of White Goose Conservation Season
- February 14 - Closing of Snipe Season
- March 20 - Closing of White Goose Conservation Season

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