

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report – 29 October 2003

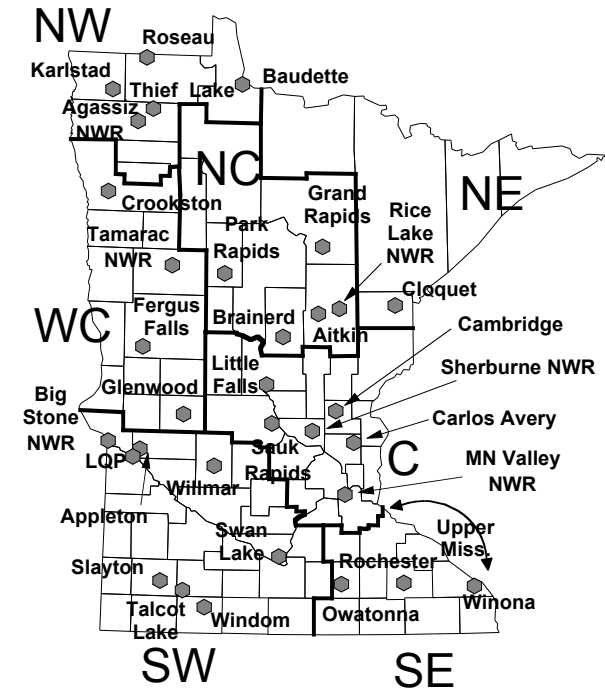
The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from around Minnesota. This is the sixth report for 2003. The Conservation Officer Report, also available on the DNR web site, also contains information about waterfowl hunter success around the state. Hunters interested in the most current information should check out some of the reports on the waterfowler web sites.

Weekly crop-weather reports for Minnesota can be obtained on the web at “www.nass.usda.gov/mn” and there are many weather sites that can provide current weather conditions and forecasts.

General: 29 October 2003, 5:00 p.m.

Hunting has been generally poor, but should or is improving in many areas. We flew NC Minnesota aerial surveys today, but the data have not been compiled. General observations from the survey include ice on smaller or shallow basins, with many to be frozen completely soon given the forecast. There were good numbers of ring-necked ducks still present on the refuges and good numbers of mallards relative to recent years. Many of these likely just arrived, since they were not present in earlier surveys. While there were additional late season migrants around, e.g. buffleheads and goldeneyes, and some new tundra swans, the major migration of these late birds had not occurred.

The next several days should be a good time to get out and check for new birds.



Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
NORTHWEST				
Roseau River WMA	Pool #1W and Pool #3 are nearly full. Pool #2 is nearly one foot below full pool. The Roseau River is getting low again with some hunters reporting rock encounters with their boats/motors. The pools remained ice-free today.	Overnight low temperatures have been in the 20s and 30s with daytime highs in the 40s ± range. Four inches of snow was on the ground this morning. The forecast is for cold temperatures and snow/rain the remainder of this week.	An aerial waterfowl survey scheduled for 10-22-2003 was canceled. Another aerial survey is planned for Oct. 29 th , weather permitting. Canada Geese and Snow Geese remained in the area this morning following yesterday's snowstorm. Based on weekend hunting success it appears waterfowl moved into the area ahead of the storm but did not stay, moving on before the storm hit on Monday.	Hunters did well, particularly in Pool #3, on Saturday Oct. 25 th but the same hunters did poor on Sunday. Hunter numbers are very low at this point in the season.
Thief Lake WMA	Low lake level conditions persist (13" below normal – comparable to 1988). Natural foods on the lake and refuge fields are in good shape. Most fields in the immediate area are tilled. Corn fields further north have been cut and are attracting field feeding birds.	Cold weather has brought occasional morning lake ice, and we currently have 3-4" of snow on the ground. Forecast lows in the teens for the weekend may bring ice.	Cold, windy weather has produced unsettled conditions. Some birds appeared to be arriving last Saturday. We don't know yet if there has been a net increase or decrease in duck numbers. Goose numbers at the last count are relatively stable with 3300 Canadas, and 2600 snow geese. Snow geese have remained longer in the area than most years.	Bag checks conducted during the last week have been lower than earlier in the season. Checks last Sunday showed 1.25 ducks per hunter. Some scaup are showing up in the bag. Hunter success in the Controlled Hunt Zone has been 0.2 geese per hunter per day, with more snows and blues being taken than Canada geese.
Baudette	Water is low. Remnant vegetation still providing some cover along shore. Fields are snow covered this week.	The doldrums have departed-six inches of snow between 10/27 and 10/28. Snow was accompanied by gusty N to NE winds on Tuesday. Have had flurries off and on since 10/24. More flurries and less wind predicted this week.	Some scaup, Goldeneyes, Buffleheads and Mallards in the area. Mergansers, Tundra Swans, and Canada Geese also seen.	Tuesday could have been one of those classic big water, bad weather days on Lake of the Woods but the ducks didn't show. Hunters in the snowstorm this morning saw Buffleheads, Goldeneyes, Mallards and a couple flocks of scaup but very low numbers in general. Some divers were shot at Zippel Bay on Saturday. We still hear rumors of a few ducks to the North and our fingers are crossed for one last shot this week.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
NORTH CENTRAL				
Park Rapids	Water levels and stream flows are still low. Water access is difficult in some areas. Corn harvest nearly complete.	Early in period above normal temps (High 60's). Cold front on Sat. with snow and rain and strong NW (20+) winds. !-2 inches of snow on 10/27 with highs in low 30's.	Little duck migration noted during the week even after the fronts, cold temps, snow and strong NW winds occurred. Goose numbers remain constant. Some EPP geese arriving in area.	Hunting activity has been low with low success. Mallards and some Green winged teal seem to be the primary birds in the bag.
Brainerd	Water levels still receding. Many dabbling ducks seen feeding in the shallow water and mud flat areas. Food appears to be abundant.	Cool and cloudy weather most of the week. Conditions were dry, except for Oct 27 th and 28 th when it was snowy and wet. Temperatures ranged from 28° - 50°F	Ringneck ducks moved into the Brainerd area. There were basically none before this count. There was an influx of mallards around Oct 24 th .	Last weekend the hunter activity was high around the Gull River and Red Sand areas. This was possibly due to the large number of mallards that moved in to these areas.
Aitkin	Low water conditions in rice beds making access a bit difficult. Rice stalks are mostly down.	Cloudy, temps in the 30's, some snow/rain.	Mostly mallards and ring-necks. Some large groups of mallards moved on. Some large rafts of coots still around. Hooded mergansers being reported.	Low hunting pressure. Most hunters getting a duck or two.
Rice Lake NWR	Wild rice has dropped, water conditions on the refuge are fair	Highs in the 50's lows in the 20's, some showers	Ring-necked ducks are here in peak numbers. Mallards have decreased.	There is no waterfowl hunting on the refuge. Waterfowl hunters have limited success in the area.
NORTHEAST				
Cloquet	No significant changes. Water levels are down, but adequate for hunting. Some ducks still feeding in rice beds. No ice yet.	Continued dry and mild thru Monday afternoon, then received 4 inches of wet snow. Cold weather N-NW winds and snow chances predicted to continue thru weekend. Shallow areas may begin to freeze by end of this week.	A few flights of ringnecks are being observed, but no significant movements of divers reported. Still some mallards, green-winged teal and honkers around.	A few birds are being taken, but hunting has been slow overall
WEST CENTRAL				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Fergus Falls	Nearly all crops harvested at this time, still dry	A couple of cold fronts with strong northwest winds and snow flurries during period	Some new ducks in but no major movement at this time. Lots of hooded mergansers and a few flocks of big divers seen on Ten Mile Lake, some ring-necked ducks reported in northeast part of Otter Tail County, no counts but lots of geese around Fergus Falls area. Very few mallards at this time.	Hunting activity low, with generally fair to poor success
CENTRAL				
Sauk Rapids	90% of all crops are harvested. Wetlands are low.	Ducky weather forecasted for the next several days. Below freezing at night, and low 40's for highs, with some rain/snow showers.	With the latest NW winds and cold, more birds are starting to trickle in. Expect things to pick up this weekend.	Some success on geese and field mallards, but still slow.
Carlos Avery WMA	Remain in good condition	Rainy and low 40's.	Not much movement. Mallards making up 90 % of birds with ring-necks and some teal making up the rest.	Activity has been very high. Those in boats doing well(2 birds per hunter) while those standing in ditches and on shore seeing limited success.
Minnesota Valley NWR		The day of the survey, temperature in the 40's, with winds up to 15 mph and light snow.	Weather has been in the 40's which brought a few more duck species into the area. There was movement of Northern Pintails, Northern Shovelers, Gadwall and Ring-necked ducks into the area, and the number of American coots decreased.	Hunter pressure has been moderate and success is average. Some hunters have noted however, that this season has been the best it's been in 20 years
SOUTHWEST				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Big Stone NWR	No change from last report. Drought conditions persist throughout the Refuge and surrounding area. All seasonal wetlands remain dry and water levels are extremely low in semi-permanent wetlands (larger water bodies). Approximately 50% of the Refuge's wetland habitats are inundated. Submerged and emergent vegetative conditions in wetland habitats are poor.	Cold front brought much cooler temperatures than previous week. Wet snow and sleet on 10/25 and 10/28. Day-time temperatures in the high 30's to low 40's. Some skim ice has formed on shallow water.	Overall duck and Canada geese numbers remain low. No influx of any waterfowl species noted on the refuge. However, large concentrations of mallards have been seen in the vicinity of the refuge, utilizing corn fields and Bentsen Lake. Influx of mallards has occurred in the area with the cold front.	Hunting pressure has increased and duck hunting has shown some improvement. Goose hunting pressure is significant, but hunting has only been fair.
Appleton	Dry, some basins still losing water – most basins are very shallow.	Frontal systems moved through the area on Sat. and Mon. with strong NW winds. Daytime temps have been cool the past several days with rain and some snow today.	Strong NW winds brought in a lot of EPP geese and some mallards (esp. Sat evening). Other migrants have been very slow to move.	Goose hunters have been enjoying more success than in earlier parts of the season. Duck hunting has been very slow.
Lac qui Parle WMA	Marsh Lake is 5-8 inches below 4-year average water level. Mudflats common in backwater areas and around points. Access will be difficult. LQP Lake and Watson Sag are at winter pool elevation. Soybean harvest done; corn harvest is 80% complete.	Strong NW winds 15-20 mph on Saturday, 25 October with periods of moderate snow and/or rain. This front dropped temperatures into the lower 40's for highs and lows in the 20's/30's. Reinforcing cold front today (28 Oct.) with very strong NW winds of 25-40 mph with periods or rain and/or snow. Temps are predicted to drop throughout the week.	Influx of ducks into the Marsh Lake system on Saturday, 25 October. Expecting a bigger push of ducks with strong NW winds today. Influx of Canada geese into the refuge on Saturday also, but low clouds and snow made it difficult to measure magnitude. Since then, strong winds and all- day feeding behavior has not allowed for an updated count. Finally, <u>expecting</u> a large influx associated with strong NW winds today. This week will be very dynamic related to the movement of waterfowl.	Based on the influx of geese/ducks over the weekend and long range forecast, do whatever you can to get out and hunt waterfowl this week – don't wait! Predicting high temps. in the low to mid 30's for weekend with lows in the 20's. Duck hunting has improved with influx of new birds. Hunter levels also increased with hopes of improved hunting. Goose hunting success continues to improve and gray skies, cold temps. and wind certainly helps.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Slayton	Lakes are low. Type I and II marshes are dry, others almost dry. Corn harvest is 85-95%. Residue is being plowed under very quickly.	.1" of rain brought no relief. Temps have dropped, weather systems consistently bringing NW winds.	Remaining teal and wood ducks bailed out last weekend. Northern Mallards are dropping in at a few local spots, in small numbers. Canada and Snow geese are loading into isolated areas. Few divers arriving.	Low duck numbers and low success continue to result in light hunting pressure. Local hunters report success is increasing as cold weather holds.
Redwood Falls	Fair to Poor. Small wetlands are by and large already dry and those that remain commonly have large mud flats ringing them.	Colder and blustery conditions, with rain/snow mix early this week and expected through the weekend. Return to colder weather will hopefully move migrant ducks into area.	Small, localized numbers of wood ducks and mallards, some green winged teal reported prior to this past weekend, otherwise few waterfowl available currently.	Water conditions are poor and few hunters are out. Success is spotty at best.
Talcot Lake WMA	Still dry with very low water levels. 95% of the corn has been harvested and farmers are busy working fields	More seasonal weather the last few days. Lows in the 30's, Highs in the 40's. Skies have been overcast, strong winds from the NW. Had .15" of rain on 10/27.	Mallard and goose numbers increased over the last day or two	Hunter activity has been slow, but will pick up with the arrival of more birds
Windom	Marshes are still very low or dry. Some have adequate water and food for waterfowl use. There is still a little bit of corn left in the fields. A good deal of fall tillage has been completed.	Very hot last week. Followed by a general cooling down, then very cold (near 20) Sunday morning (10/26). Daytime highs are currently near 40 and night time temps about 30. Strong northwest winds on Saturday (10/25) and Tuesday (10/28).	Thru last week there was a general trickle through of small and mid-size ducks. These may have been largely pushed out with the cold on Sunday morning. We appear to have gained a few mallards, a very few. Also goose numbers may have increased very slightly. It is hopeful the current weather pattern will bring a few more birds into the area.	Pressure is very light. Those out are occasionally getting a few birds.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Swan Lake - Nicollet County	Water levels on most area wetlands are very low. Swan lake, is very shallow. Lake level is about 2 feet 6 inches below run-out elevation. Submergent vegetation on Swan Lake is excellent with most of lake covered with sago pondweed, northern water milfoil, coontail and a variety of other plants. There are also abundant beds of wild celery. Emergent vegetation has shown some improvement over last year. There is lots of food available to ducks. The low water levels also provide for less motor boat disturbance.	Strong Northwest winds and cold on Tuesday, 10/28.	There were about 5000 ducks counted in South Bay of Swan Lake on Friday 10/24. Most of these were sitting in the South Bay Voluntary Refuge. Most prevalent ducks seen were gadwalls Widgeon, and Mallards. Some Redheads, Canvasback and a few pintail were also noted. The main refuge is holding good numbers of Mallards and some Pintail. Some Divers, mostly ringnecks were showing up on some of the lakes but very few divers were noted on Swan Lake. No major migration of ducks was noted. Ducks are scarce on many of the WMA's in South Central MN due to low water or completely dry basins.	Hunters on Swan Lake are still getting some ducks.
SOUTHEAST				
Owatonna	The dry trend continues . . . rivers, lakes and marshes low (or dry). Mudflats and/or stranded cattails ring many lakes. Corn and soybean harvest are nearly done. Extensive fall tillage is reducing waste grain availability.	Less than a 0.10 inch measurable precipitation fell this week in the form of both rain and snow. Highs in the 50s gave way to the 40s and strong WNW and NW winds with the passing of cold fronts on the afternoon of the 25 th and 27 th - 28 th . There was no accumulation of snow. Rim ice formed on smaller water bodies with temps in the 'teens and 20s on Monday morning.	Coots, gadwalls, ruddy ducks and pintails seemed to have moved out with the NW winds and cold fronts. Mallards and other ducks are mostly associated with refuges or other areas that do not allow hunting. Some flocks of wood ducks are still being seen in the area. A few small flocks of scaup arrived with the cold fronts. Canada geese remain the most abundant waterfowl in the area.	Mid week activity has been low. Weekend waterfowl hunting pressure picked up as more favorable duck hunting weather moved into the area. Hunting success is very variable. Bag reports showed hunters averaging 0.8 birds per hunter and a mixed bag.
Winona	Low water levels. Corn harvest 70%, bean harvest 90%	Cooling temp, 30-40°F low, 45-55°F highs, light rain.	More divers continue to filter in. Mallards, pintails and some gadwall around.	Hunting pressure normal. Harvest low. Most of the birds and food are in the closed refuges.

Waterfowl Count Data on selected Minnesota areas, week of October 27, 2003.

Area	Date	Swan this week	Canada geese			Ducks				Coot this week	Comments
			Number seen ^a :			Number seen:			This weeks duck Species - % composition ^b		
			This week	Last count	Last year	This week	Last count	Last year			
NORTHWEST											
Roseau River WMA & Area											Not counted yet.
Thief Lake WMA & Area											Not counted yet.
Agassiz NWR	10/28/03	200	2,000	3,000	200	14,875	33,900	975	34% mal, 27% gad, 13% wig, 13% gwt	50	1,000 snow geese
NORTH CENTRAL											
Beltrami/Clearwater Cos.				550			7,750				Data not yet compiled
Winni/Bowstring area or Chippewa Nat. Forest N				39			28,075				Data not yet compiled
Leech Lake/Deer River Chippewa Nat. Forest S				0			140,875				Data not yet compiled
Rice Lake NWR	10/24/03		1,923	2,015		196,000	133,100		96% RN, 3% mal, 1% wd	5,140	Last week's survey
Brainerd Area Lakes	10/27/03	2	75	172	60	3,050	1,600	4,250	17% RN, 16% mal 12% scp 1% wd	2,510	
WEST CENTRAL											
Tamarac NWR											
Shallow Lakes (north)				130			10,150				
CENTRAL											
Sherburne NWR											
Carlos Avery WMA	10/28/03	3	50	350	225	10,825	9,910	8,580	76% mal, 20% RN, 2% wig, 1% gwt	2,000	
Minn. Valley NWR	10/28/03	0	222	205	440	2,915	3,770	1,830	31% mal, 25% RN, 14% pin, 14% wig	2,140	

SOUTHWEST											
Big Stone NWR	10/28/03	0	5,575	4,115	7,120	5,575	10,240	21,100	67% mal, 22% gwt, 4% shov, 3% gad	0	
Big Stone, LQP, Swift Co. areas	10/27/03	7	3,965	300		8,825	1,675		80% mal, 4% gad, 3% scp, 3% rud, 3% can	370	Last count – 14 Oct
Lac qui Parle WMA				45,000	147,000		10,000	35,000			No count this week
Murray Co. lakes & wetlands				900			14				
SW Shallow Lakes				2,105			17,540				
Talcot Lake WMA	10/28/03	0	1,175	1,300	2,500	1,660	140	4,875	100% mal		6 snow
SOUTHEAST											
Owatonna area				6,750			1,010				
Rochester											

^a- Numbers seen during the current survey, last survey: the previous count from this year, last year: the number recorded during the same or nearby week last year.

^b- abbreviations: MAL = mallard, BLK = Black Duck, GAD = Gadwall, WIG = Am. wigeon, GWT = Am. green-winged teal, BWT = blue-winged teal, SHOV = Northern shoveler, PIN = Northern pintail, WD = Wood duck, RED = Redhead, CAN = Canvasback, SCP = Scaup, RN = Ring-necked duck, GE = Common goldeneye, BUF = Bufflehead, RUD = Ruddy duck, MERG = Large merganser, HOOD = Hooded merganser, NS = no survey.