

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report – 3 November 2003

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from around Minnesota. This is the seventh 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.

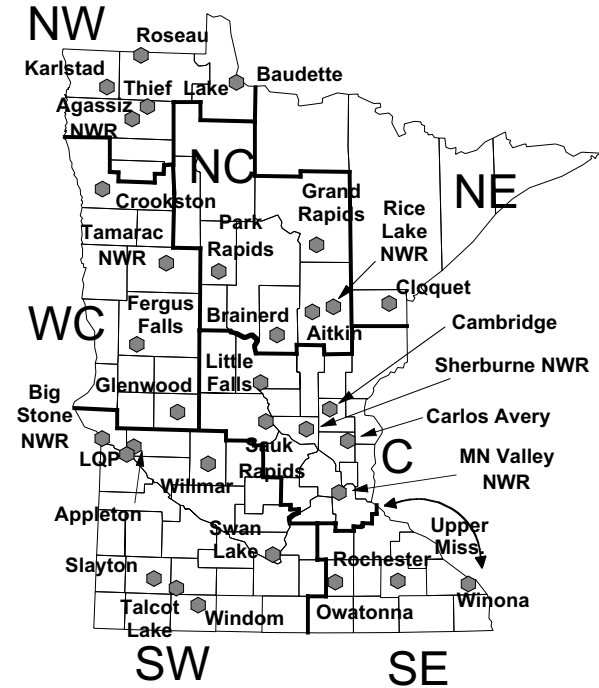
General: 4 November 2003, 5:00 p.m.

Ice and snow greeted waterfowlers across most of the state last week. Many regions experienced single digit temperatures as wetlands began to freeze up in most areas. Forecasts call for continued cold temperatures through the remainder of this week with the possibility of a slight warming trend in the southern portion of the state by early next week.

Many hunters reported good success late last week and over the weekend prior to freeze up. Hunters were often forced to search out larger lakes to find available open water. We experienced a large influx of typical late season migrants (i.e. tundra swans, buffleheads, goldeneyes, and mergansers) but numbers of ring-necked ducks declined drastically as they migrated south. Mallard numbers increased in many areas but snow and ice continue to hamper hunting opportunities for many hunters. Canada goose numbers continued to build at Lac qui Parle WMA with new birds arriving last weekend.

Hunters should note that pintail season is closed and canvasback season will close statewide on Nov. 9th. Canada goose season closes Nov. 5th in the West and Northwest zones until it reopens on Dec. 6th. Hunters should use caution and keep safety in mind when dealing with icy and dangerous hunting conditions late in the season.

There will be no migration report next week as most DNR staff will be involved with deer seasons and CWD testing.



Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
NORTHWEST				
Roseau River WMA	Ice and snow cover.	Overnight low temperature this morning was minus two degrees. Otherwise overnight lows have been in the single digits to low 20s with daytime highs in the 20s & 30s. Three inches of snow on the ground. The forecast is for cold temperatures (not above freezing) and some snow the remainder of this week.	An aerial waterfowl survey scheduled for 10-29-2003 was canceled. No other aerial survey is planned. Waterfowl moved through the area starting Thursday and Friday, October 30 th and 31 st and continued into the nighttime hours Sunday, November 2 nd .	Hunter numbers are very low at this point in the season and hunter success has been poor.
Thief Lake WMA	Ice and snow.	Friday night brought 14 degrees and freeze-up. Most of the lake was covered with 1 _ " of ice. Only a few open leads persisted. Sunday night brought 4 degrees, and the freezing of the few remaining open pockets. Snow on Saturday night and Tuesday eliminated field feeding.	Extensive movement of birds was observed on Friday, with most observed leaving the lake. After freeze-up, a few geese, mallards and swans stayed on the lake through Monday.	Bag checks conducted last Friday showed good success (2.7 ducks per hunter), as birds were moving prior to freeze-up. Bag checks on Saturday were slow (0.3 ducks per hunter).
Baudette	Snow covered and mostly frozen.	Five inches of snow on 11/4. We have had regular flurries since six inches of snow last week.	Canada geese, Tundra Swans and Snow Geese still in area. Significant numbers of ducks were seen on Lake of the Woods on Monday 11/3 but the lake is freezing up. Getting at ducks would require crossing some ice if they are still out there today.	Nearly all locals have given up on waterfowl to prepare for deer season. Hunting is still possible in Four Mile Bay and along the Rainy. Generally, this season was not as good as some recent years.
NORTH CENTRAL				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Grand Rapids	The big lakes and major rivers still have open water. All the other shallow water bodies are frozen.	The temperatures have been below freezing and there is 3 inches of snow on the ground. More snow and cold weather predicted for the rest of the week.	There was a large movement of waterfowl out of the area over the weekend. Many flocks of swans were observed the past few days.	Weekend hunting pressure was moderate to high. Very mixed success. Access to open water on many of the duck lakes and rivers is getting more difficult.
Park Rapids	Ponds, rice beds and smaller lakes froze over during the week. Larger lakes open with some access restricted due to ice.	Cold temps after front passage moved waterfowl out of and into the area.	Mixed divers moving through with many greater and lesser scaup, redhead, goldeneye and mergansers (mostly hooded) arriving during the weekend. No apparent mallard movement observed. Canada geese and Tundra swans migrating over the weekend.	Hunting activity increased over the weekend with parties taking advantage of the divers. Good shooting opportunities were present for short periods in AM and PM.
Brainerd	Water levels continue to recede. Many small ponds & wetlands froze over on 11/1/03. Many rice lakes froze over on 11/2/03.	Cool and cloudy weather. Temperatures ranged from 23° to 39°F.	Noted more ringnecks moving into the area. Bufflehead & Goldeneye are slowly increasing in number. Wood ducks, for the most part, have gone.	Fair amount of hunter activity noted in the area. Most activity occurs on weekends, with very little during the week.
Aitkin	Shallow lakes and rice basins are freezing.	Cloudy, temps in the 20-30's, ~4" snow on the 4th	Large movement of tundra swans on the weekend. Mixture of goldeneyes, buffleheads, scaup, ringnecks, hooded mergansers observed.	Low hunting pressure. Some interest still on the larger lakes.
Rice Lake NWR	Wild rice has dropped, water conditions on the refuge are fair	Cold temps and ice forming.	Many ring-necked ducks left the refuge with the cold temps and icy conditions.	There is no waterfowl hunting on the refuge. Waterfowl hunters have limited success in the area.
WEST CENTRAL				
Fergus Falls	Many small wetlands froze, deeper basins and lakes still open	Cold, highs in 30's with lows in mid 20's	Large movement of birds on Sunday and Monday. Late season ducks and swans observed including goldeneye, scaup, redheads, mergansers, canvasback and mallards. Still a lot of geese around.	Few reports. Hunting success appeared spotty.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Tamarac NWR	Most of the shallow wild rice lakes and all the small potholes are froze over. Larger, deeper lakes are still mostly open but beginning to freeze along the shorelines.	Low temps (below freezing) have persisted most of the last week. These temps have been 10-15 degrees below average for this time of year. Light snow showers have occurred late last week and up to 3" on Tues (11/04).	Most of the birds have pushed out of the area over the weekend with the cold temps and "ice-up", but we continue to see some mallards, ring-necks, Canada geese and a small mixture of other species such as redheads, canvasbacks, buffleheads, and hooded mergansers. Tundra swans were heard flying over on in good numbers on Sat night (11/1).	Hunters were having pretty good success with mallards during the middle of last week just prior to freeze up. However, pressure and success has dropped off dramatically since many lakes froze over.
CENTRAL				
Sherburne NWR	Water is receding in natural wetlands. Good water in main hunting impoundment. Food resources are fair.	Unseasonably cold. Wet snow yesterday, staying on ground in open areas. Predicted highs and lows are below normal.	Northern birds coming in.	No data.
Carlos Avery WMA				No report.
Minnesota Valley NWR		Temperatures near freezing with light snow and calm winds.	Large numbers of tundra swans showing up along with an influx of ring-necked ducks and northern shovelers. Wood ducks and coots have migrated south.	Hunting success has leveled off and pressure continues to be moderate.
SOUTHWEST				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Big Stone NWR	Most of the Refuge wetlands are frozen over. The two largest wetlands are partially frozen with significant open water available for loafing birds. The Minnesota River remains open. Six inches of snow blanket the Refuge.	Temperatures were in the high 30s last week. A cold front moved in on Monday morning dropped the temperature into the high 20s and brought with it six inches of snow.	Migration species diversity has started to decline. The conversion from early season dabbler species to late season diver species has occurred. Green-winged teal numbers have dropped significantly from last week. Northern shoveler migration numbers continue to rise. Hooded mergansers are migrating through the area and the coots have moved on. Eighteen tundra swans are present on the Refuge. Canada goose numbers have continued to decline during the last two weeks.	Hunter activity and success for waterfowl has increased in the last two weeks. Goose hunters have been successful as well.
Appleton	Crop harvest and most fall tillage is complete 4 to 6 inches of snow cover, many shallow basins starting to freeze.	Cold fronts over the weekend brought in 4 to 6 inches of snow and much colder temps.	A large push of Canada geese was evident late Sat and on through Sun. Mallards also were on the move.	Field hunting for geese and mallards has improved dramatically. Over water hunting is getting restricted to larger lakes due to icing.
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.	Below average temperatures for the reporting period – high's in the mid-30's and lows in the upper 20's. Hit 15 degrees on Saturday morning which meant _” ice cover on area wetlands including Marsh Lake. Strong NW winds 15-20 mph on Friday, 31 October. Heavy snow occurring today – expecting 6-8 inches.	<u>Major</u> influx of Canada geese and ducks (mostly mallard) into the LQP Refuge & Marsh Lake on Friday, 31 October and Saturday, 1 November. This was the largest movement of waterfowl observed yet this season. As of Sunday, 2 November, 112,000 Canada geese and 25,000 ducks on the refuge.	Duck hunting success improved on Friday, 31 October with the push of new birds but hunting was hampered the next day with 100% ice coverage on Marsh Lake. Area is again ice-free and should remain that way until Friday. I expect fair to good duck hunting until then and expect more birds to move through the area. Goose hunting success continues to improve each day and plenty of birds are available for excellent hunting.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Slayton	Lakes are low. Type I and II marshes are dry, others almost dry. Crop residue is basically plowed under.	Winter weather has arrived. Some snow and freezing rain, but little additional water in the marshes. The water is getting harder by the day, may get above freezing late in the week.	Northern Mallards are dropping in at a few local spots, in fair numbers. Canada and Snow geese are loading into isolated areas. Few divers arriving.	Low duck numbers and bad weather continue to result in light hunting pressure. Local hunters report fair success, but duck numbers are still lower than expected.
Redwood Falls	Fair to Poor. Small wetlands are by and large already dry and those that remain commonly have large mud flats ringing them.	Cold 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 numbers of northern birds have moved into the area, including mallard, canvasback, and redhead. Canada geese were on the move this past weekend but appear to have largely overflowed the area. Small flocks of migrant Canadas are available in some areas.	Waterfowl hunting activity is generally limited and localized at this time, with hunters taking small bags when out.
Talcot Lake WMA	Water levels remain low. Almost all the crops have been harvested and farmers are working the fields. Rain yesterday coated vegetation with ice.	Cold and overcast. 2 -3 inches of snow fell in the morning on 11/3 then it rained and everything was coated with _ - _ in. of ice.	Ducks and geese moved in over the weekend. Over 3,000 ring-necks were on the lake on Sunday 11/2.	Hunter activity has picked up a little with hunters trying to get out before the season ends.
Swan Lake - Nicollet County				No report.
SOUTHEAST				
Winona	Low water levels remain.	Cooling temps, rain/snow mix on 11/3 and 11/4.	Large numbers of swans arriving along with diving ducks into the refuge.	Hunting pressure normal with mixed success.

Waterfowl Count Data on selected Minnesota areas, week of November 3, 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	10/29/03										Survey cancelled.
Thief Lake WMA & Area	11/04/03										Frozen.
Agassiz NWR	10/28/03			2,000			14,875		34% mal, 27% gad, 13% wig, 13% gwt		Last week's survey
NORTH CENTRAL											
Beltrami/Clearwater Cos.	11/04/03	192	114	645		2,155	15,487		78% mal, 6% RN, 4% scp, 4% buf	230	Many wetlands frozen
Winni/Bowstring area or Chippewa Nat. Forest N	11/04/03	534	92	79		45,830	62,139		69% mal, 20% scp, 11% RN	110	Many wetlands frozen
Leech Lake/Deer River Chippewa Nat. Forest S	11/04/03	1,302	30	0		58,075	188,222		79% RN, 21% mal	550	Many wetlands frozen
Rice Lake NWR	11/03/03	370	906	1,483		26,913	109,996		62% RN, 38% mal	60	
Brainerd Area Lakes	11/03/03		279	75	18	3,415	3,050	167	64% RN, 20% mal 12% scp 1% wd	655	
WEST CENTRAL											
Tamarac NWR	11/03/03	145	220	1,629	2	4,013	11,764	20	73% RN, 18% mal, 4% hood		
Shallow Lakes (north)	11/04/03	90	0	130		5/750	10,150		64% RN, 35% mal	1,500	
CENTRAL											
Sherburne NWR	10/29/03	2	5,250		1,000	13,050		230	71% mal, 8% gad, 5% RN, 4% gwt	750	Last week's survey
Carlos Avery WMA	10/28/03	3	50	350	186	10,825	9,910	263	76% mal, 20% RN, 2% wig, 1% gwt	2,000	
Minn. Valley NWR	11/05/03	430	332	222		2,880	2,915		32% RN, 27% mal, 18% pin, 8% wig	1,575	

SOUTHWEST											
Big Stone NWR	11/04/03	18	3,496	5,525	8,437	2,980	5,575	31,780	42% mal, 24% shov, 7% gad, 7% scp	0	
Big Stone, LQP, Swift Co. areas	11/04/03	178	11,250	3,965	4,700	15,880	8,825	5,275	86% mal, 9% scp, 2% gwt	700	
Lac qui Parle WMA	11/02/03		112,000	70,000	147,000	25,000	10,000	35,000	100% mal		
Murray Co. lakes & wetlands	11/04/03		5,950	900	2,700	5,600		2,100	100% mal		
SW Shallow Lakes											Survey cancelled
Talcot Lake WMA	11/04/03	0	5,150	1,715	7,500	6,260	1,660	9,000	97% mal, 3% RN		
SOUTHEAST											
Owatonna area				6,750			1,010				No report
Rochester											No report

^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, SHOVS = 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.