

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report – 17 November 2003

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from around Minnesota. This is the eighth 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: 20 November 2003, 10:00 p.m.

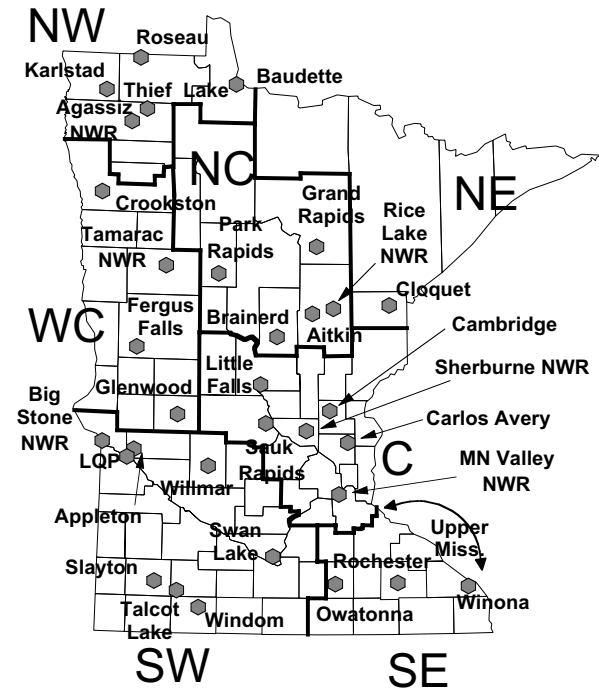
Most of the state experienced a warming trend this past week with above average temperatures. Extended forecasts call for continued warm temperatures through the remainder of this week with a cold front expected by the weekend bringing additional snow and below normal temperatures to much of the state.

Many wetlands and lakes remain ice covered or partially ice covered across the northern 1/3 of the state. Most wetlands and lakes in the central and southern portions of the state remain ice-free or have reopened with the warmer temperatures.

Reports from northern and central Minnesota indicate some mallards, goldeneyes, scaup and mergansers remain along with localized concentrations of Canada geese. Some hunters have been having some late season success by hunting on rivers that remain open. Ice is still hampering access to many larger lakes that have partially reopened in northern Minnesota. Mallard and Canada goose numbers have increased across much of southern Minnesota but reports indicate mixed hunter success. Hunters willing to scout have been finding opportunities for field feeding mallards in many areas.

Hunters should note that the Canada goose season in the West-Central zone closed on Nov. 19th. Duck season will close statewide on Nov. 25th.

This will be the last migration report for ducks this year. One additional report will be posted in December for hunters taking advantage of the December Canada goose seasons across most of the state.



Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
NORTHWEST				
Roseau River WMA	Ice and snow cover.			Few, if any, waterfowl left in the area.
Thief Lake WMA	Frozen up.	Snow is melting now, but lake is ice covered, and won't open 'til spring.	No birds in area.	None.
Baudette	Snow covered and mostly frozen.			Few, if any, waterfowl left in the area.
NORTH CENTRAL				
Grand Rapids	Lakes and ponds are opening back up.	Above normal temperatures.	Very few ducks and geese are left in the area.	Little hunting activity.
Park Rapids	Ponds, rice beds and smaller lakes are still frozen. Some portions of larger lakes have reopened but access is restricted due to ice.	Average temps predicted for the remainder of the duck season.	A few mallards, goldeneyes, mergansers, Canada geese, and swans remain in the area.	A few locals are still taking birds. Majority of waterfowl have migrated south.
Brainerd	Only larger and deeper lakes, rivers and creeks are open and available for waterfowl use.	Cool and cloudy temperatures ranging from 18°F to 46°F. Warmer weather with scattered showers and drizzle melted the 3 to 7 inches of snow we had received earlier.	Have heard that Canada Geese are starting to build up on the Crow Wing River. This will be checked out when time allows. Goldeneye and Mergansers can be found in small numbers on MilleLacs Lake.	Little to no waterfowl hunting activity noted.
Rice Lake NWR	Wild rice has dropped, water conditions on the refuge are fair		50% ice covered; no waterfowl present	There is no waterfowl hunting on the refuge.
WEST CENTRAL				
Fergus Falls	Still open water on large basins	mild	Still good number of geese around and some field feeding mallards	Very low with deer hunting going on
CENTRAL				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Little Falls	Most wetlands frozen over since early-November, but some are opening up again with the warmer weather this week.	Cold weather experienced in early-November has given way this week to mild conditions. Most of the snow received on Nov. 2-3 finally melted this past week.	Few ducks around right now. More geese than ducks in many areas. Cold fronts in late-October and early-November never produced large flights as expected. Most birds remained farther west.	Some opportunity available on area rivers and larger wetlands that have begun to thaw. Overall very little hunting activity in area.
Sauk Rapids	Frozen wetlands are opening up. Rivers are open. Crops are mostly harvested.	A late season waterfowler couldn't ask for much more! Warmer with fronts moving through.	Localized flocks of mallards offer great hunting opportunities.	As usual, the hunters that are out scouting have the good stories to tell.
Sherburne NWR	Wetlands froze over on Nov. 7. Now, after a week of above freezing days and nights the water is open again.	Average to above average temperatures last week and forecast for this week.	Major exodus from area the week of November 3, as cold fronts moved in and wetlands froze over. Northern birds, divers, and tundra swan migrations through area on Nov. 5-6. No birds have returned to area since the water opened this weekend (Nov 16).	No significant duck hunting activity during deer firearms season (Nov. 8-16)
Carlos Avery WMA	Frozen but thawed partially during the past week.	Temps warmed slightly and partial thawing occurred.	No ducks returned when the lake opened back up.	Low.
Minnesota Valley NWR		Temperatures near 50.	Most migrants seem to have departed and no big influx of new birds. Lakes and wetlands have opened back up.	Hunting success has been poor.
SOUTHWEST				

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Big Stone NWR	Approximately, 20% of the Refuge's largest conservation pool is ice-free. Most of the other wetlands either have small open water pockets or remain frozen. The snow that blanketed the surrounding area last week as melted. Small portions of the Minnesota River have opened.	Above average temperatures (40-50s) persisted throughout last week and through the weekend. A temperature of 61 degrees was reported for Monday. Low temperatures were in the 30s. The warm weather melted the area snow and helped open portions of the Refuge wetlands. A cold front should move into the area starting Thursday night and will remain through the weekend. Forecasted highs are in the low 30s and snow is possible.	A significant influx of Canada geese and a few snow geese (mostly blues) arrived over the weekend.	Hunter activity was limited and poor success noted over the weekend. Plenty of geese remain in the area. Goose hunting should be fair this week. Mallard numbers for this time of year remain low. Duck hunting may be poor this week as most of the migrating birds have left.
Lac qui Parle WMA	As of 11-17, Marsh Lake and Lac qui Parle Lake were still mostly ice-covered although pockets of open water existed. I expect with warming trend and forecasted winds for these bodies of water to continue to open up.	Warming trend over the past few days with south winds. Dense fog Saturday and Sunday morning.	No migrations noted. We still estimate 150,000+ geese on the refuge and 20-30,000 mallards. Warming trend and ice-out is redistributing these birds throughout the area.	Goose hunting ends in the West-Central Zone (LQP WMA and Vicinity) on Wednesday, 19 November. Goose hunting has been good to excellent. Warming trend and clear skies have slowed hunting the past few days, however. Few duck hunters and most action has been centered on field hunting. I have not given up on over water hunting, as warming trend will again make this possible. Will the ducks be there is another question?
Slayton	Lakes and large marshes have thawed. Crop fields are plowed, but open.	A brief warm spell looks to give way to snow and rain by the weekend.	Northern Mallards are continuing to arrive in ever-increasing numbers. Canada and Snow geese are loading into isolated areas. Few divers still around.	Local hunters report fair success for mallards. Hunting pressure is still light, but more hunters are expected as migration continues to increase.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Windom	Water levels have dropped through out the season. Ice was thick about 10 days ago. Now very mild weather has opened up almost all water areas.	Cold a little over 10 days ago has been replaced by very mild weather. Highs are in the 40's and 50's and sometimes into the 60's. Freezing temps overnight have been rare in the last week.	Geese have been moving thru and into the area. Numbers are now very good, Still fairly good numbers of mallards in some areas.	Very little pressure.
Talcot Lake WMA	Harvest 100% complete. Mild weather has allowed for above normal amount of fall field cultivation. Wetlands are very low, but currently ice-free.	Small wetlands began to freeze over on 11/6 and by 11/8 large lakes were frozen and ice fishermen were out on 3" of ice. Since 11/10, the weather has warmed considerably, with daytime highs in the upper 50's by midweek.	Large numbers of mallards and geese emigrated to Talcot ahead of and during the cold weather of last week. While most geese remained, most mallards seemed to depart. However, mallard numbers again appear to be building at Talcot, but still only number about 2,000.	The West Goose Season closed on 11/5 and the December Goose Season will open 12/6. Hunting pressure on ducks has been light and birds bagged have been few. Recently, hunting success has improved slightly.
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 motorboat disturbance.	Warm for November. Swan Lake is completely ice free at this time. Forecast for 60 degree temps for Thursday. Possible snow forecast for weekend.	Swan lake was surveyed on Wednesday, 11/19. There are scattered small flocks of Mallards around the lake. A flock of about 500 mallards got up and settled back down in the refuge. No ducks were seen in the south bay open water refuge. No divers were observed on Swan Lake.	Hunters on Swan Lake were getting a few ducks.
SOUTHEAST				
Winona	Low water levels remain.	Single digit temps on 11/8, then 50s-60s from 11/11 on	Abundant numbers of mallards throughout area but difficult to decoy	Good hunting weekend of 11/8; also heavy hunting pressure during storm on 11/12 for divers and mallards.

Area	Habitat	Weather	Migrations/Observations	Hunter Activity and Success
Rochester	<p data-bbox="380 233 737 282">Presently there are good feeding conditions in harvested cornfields.</p> <p data-bbox="380 315 737 388">Geese have been utilizing corn stubble and grazing on grass and winter wheat.</p>	<p data-bbox="806 233 1073 388">Above average temperatures with some moisture has helped somewhat increase the levels of water in impoundments</p>	<p data-bbox="1106 233 1444 388">We have not had any significant immigrations for two weeks of geese. The estimated goose numbers for Olmsted County is 15,000 geese.</p>	<p data-bbox="1463 233 1875 388">Most of the hunting activity has been during the weekends with the decoy setups being the most successful. Hunters on the North side of the refuge were getting some shooting this past weekend.</p>

Waterfowl Count Data on selected Minnesota areas, week of November 17, 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	11/17/03		0			0					Frozen.
Thief Lake WMA & Area	11/17/03		0			0					Frozen.
NORTH CENTRAL											
Beltrami/Clearwater Cos.	11/18/03			114	0		2,155	200			NS; most areas still frozen
Winni/Bowstring area or Chippewa Nat. Forest N	11/18/03			92	40		45,830	4,600			NS; most areas still frozen
Leech Lake/Deer River Chippewa Nat. Forest S	11/18/03			30	0		58,075	1,200			NS, most areas remain frozen, some open water on large lakes
Rice Lake NWR	11/18/03		0	906		0	26,913				50% open water; no waterfowl
Brainerd Area Lakes	11/17/03	0	0	279		120	3,415		68% mal, 2% wd	0	Most lakes frozen
WEST CENTRAL											
Shallow Lakes (north)	11/18/03	90		130			10,150		64% RN, 35% mal	1,500	NS, most areas remain frozen
CENTRAL											
Sherburne NWR	11/18/03	2	1,000	2,000		400	700		100% mal		Wetlands opened back up
Carlos Avery WMA	11/18/03	7	0		275	5		10	100% mal		
Minn. Valley NWR	11/19/03		1,100	332	575	929	2,880	1,300	86% mal, 8% shov, 5% RN		Incomplete survey

SOUTHWEST											
Big Stone NWR	11/18/03		14,537	27		1,130	171		100 % mal		
Lac qui Parle WMA	11/16/03		150,000	150,000		25,000	25,000		100% mal		
Murray Co. lakes & wetlands	11/18/03	10	16,300	9,700		8,100	4,430		91% mal, 4% sca		400 snow geese
SW Shallow Lakes	11/14/03	29	9,675	10,090		109,000	10,800		94% mal, 5% wig, 1% can		Some snow geese present
Talcot Lake WMA	11/18/03		7,650	5,150	7,050	2,050	6,260	10,650	98% mal, 1% buf, 1% ge		
SOUTHEAST											
Owatonna area				6,750			1,010				No report
Rochester	11/18/03		15,000								Ground survey

^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.