

Arkansas Game & Fish Commission

Wildlife Management Division

Aerial waterfowl surveys were conducted on 5 December through 9 December by observers Paul Provence (Northeast), Sonny Thompson (Grand Prairie and East-central), Kiah Gardner (Western Arkansas River Valley), Griffin Park (Southwest) and Andrew James (Southeast). The weather was clear to partly cloudy with high temperatures ranging from the mid 30's to low 50's and low temperatures from the mid 10's to lower 40's.

Wetland habitat conditions across much of the state are poor. Most areas of the state are still waiting on the usual fall rains but they have yet to come. Statewide, few AGFC areas have a good amount of water and popular areas such as Bayou Meto are quite dry with no major rain in the forecast. Some private duck clubs have already pumped water and their fields are flooded but many did not pump this year due to high diesel prices.

This survey was conducted at approximately the same time as last year's survey, and total numbers of ducks observed are noted in Table 1. The statewide total duck count of 289,589 represents a 50% decrease from last year's count of 558,380 (178,504 in 2003, 815,736 in 2002 and 971,241 in 2001). Total duck numbers are almost 55% lower than the December Survey 5-year average of 638,398 ducks. The mallard count of 182,302 is 55% lower than last year's count of 406,924, and 55% below the 5-year average of 407,539 and 58% below the 10-year average of 440,924 (Figure 1). Mallard numbers normally peak in Arkansas during the December aerial surveys; however, it appears that extremely cold conditions to our north and record dry conditions in Arkansas may have pushed mallards farther south into Louisiana and Mississippi. Gadwalls were the 2nd most abundant dabbling duck on the survey with an estimated count of 45,485 that was 23% below last year's count of 59,049. Snow Goose numbers (277,641) were 50% above last year's count of 183,505. Numbers of white-fronted geese (45,515) were up 6% from 2004 (42,731).

The Arkansas December 2005 survey was well below the 20-year average for this time period (Figure 2). Although harsh winter weather has been tearing across the Midwest, few new ducks are making their way into Arkansas. Duck numbers are very low for this time of year and our drought conditions are not going to help that number increase. Historic aerial survey results broken down by moth can be found in Figure 3.

Aerial waterfowl surveys are used to reflect numbers of ducks and geese using regions of Arkansas and the status of migrations and habitat conditions. These surveys add to the long-term information base that biologists use to manage wetlands and establish hunting seasons. This is a good reminder that our periodic surveys serve as an index to migrations and waterfowl numbers but do not necessarily reflect the patterns of bird use or hunting prospects. Use these survey results to gain a good general idea about waterfowl numbers and conditions, but pay more attention to near-term reports on weather, habitat, and hunting success to guide your specific hunting plans. More specific WMA reports are available weekly on the Duck Hotline Number 501-223-6478 or on the AGFC website www.agfc.com.

Primary migrations can occur at any time between October and January and departure from northern states to southern wintering grounds depends on northern habitat conditions and the timing of severe weather events. Likewise the length of time ducks stay in Arkansas depends on these same conditions. These responses determine when key migration events occur which in turn affects the timing and extent of hunting opportunity

and success. Survey reports are compiled from throughout Arkansas and published on the AGFC homepage reflecting current year trends in migration.

Table 1. Numbers of waterfowl observed in Arkansas during aerial waterfowl surveys conducted during December of 2005.

<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>NW AR River</u>	<u>Southwest</u>	<u>Northeast</u>	<u>East Central</u>	<u>Grand Prairie</u>	<u>Southeast</u>	<u>Statewide</u>
Mallard	14,799	11,574	127,640	400	4,200	24,089	182,702
Gadwall	3,244	6,150	20,510	150	2600	12,981	45,635
Widgeon	150	530	812	150	1600	400	3,642
G.W. Teal	825	1,035	8,470	0	0	2,281	12,611
N. Shoveler	550	0	10,260	0	1100	1,122	13,032
N. Pintail	215	5	16730	0	500	2,658	20,108
Wood Duck	0	0	500	0	1700	0	2200
<u>ALL DABLERS</u>	<u>19,783</u>	<u>19,294</u>	<u>184,922</u>	<u>700</u>	<u>11,700</u>	<u>43,531</u>	<u>279,930</u>
Redhead	0	75	0	0	0	0	75
Canvasback	0	20	25	0	0	0	45
Scaup	0	0	510	0	0	5840	6,350
Ring-necked Duck	0	0	525	0	0	1942	2467
Bufflehead	0	51	0	0	0	370	421
Mergansers	25	0	15	0	0	0	40
Goldeneye	0	0	0	0	0	270	270
<u>ALL DIVERS</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>146</u>	<u>1075</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>8,422</u>	<u>9,668</u>
<u>ALL DUCKS</u>	<u>19,808</u>	<u>19,440</u>	<u>185,997</u>	<u>700</u>	<u>11,700</u>	<u>51,953</u>	<u>289,598</u>
Snow/Ross' G.	0	560	227,500	1,000	13000	36,581	278,641
White-fronted G.	0	125	26,390	1,000	5000	1,400	33,915
Canada Geese	1,195	75	800	0	0	100	2,170
<u>ALL GEESE</u>	<u>1,195</u>	<u>760</u>	<u>254,690</u>	<u>2,000</u>	<u>18000</u>	<u>38,081</u>	<u>314,726</u>
Coot	680	725	8,000	0	0	303	9,708
Pelican	195	87	0	0	0	107	389
Eagle	1	2	1	0	0	1	5
Cormorant	1900	2675	55	0	0	6644	11274

Figure 1. Mallards Observed During December Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl Surveys From 1996-2005

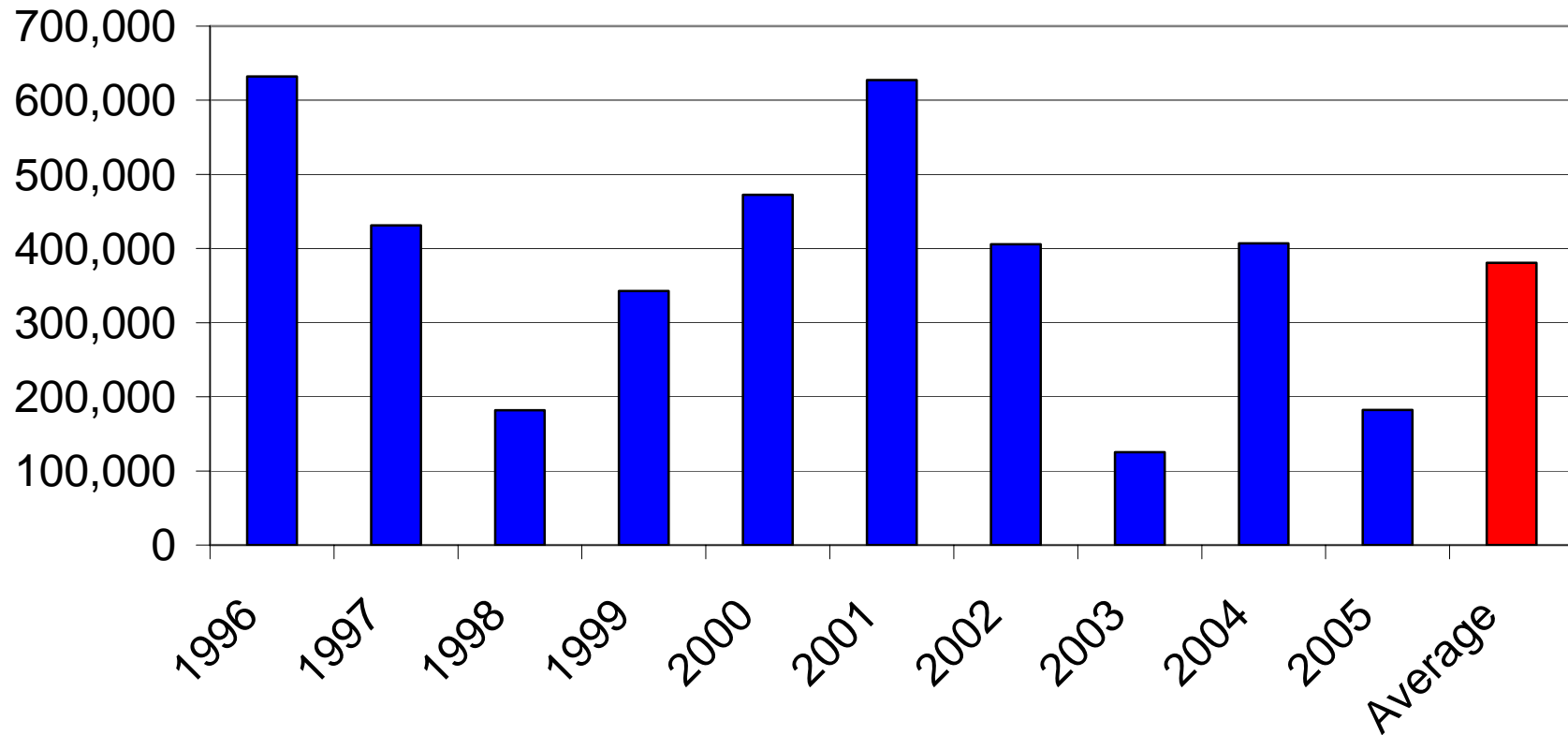


Figure 2. All Ducks Observed During December Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl Surveys From 1985-2005

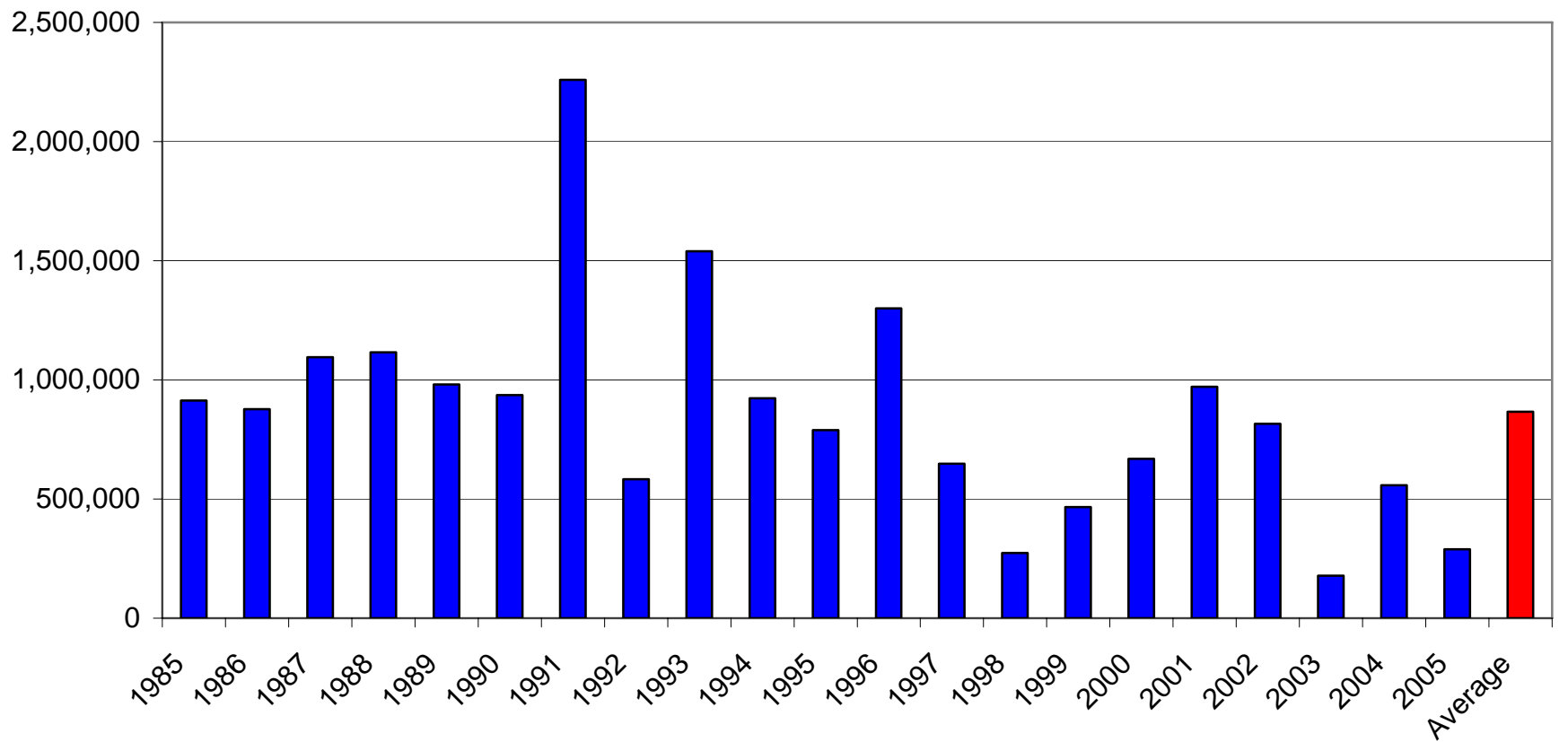


Figure 3. All Ducks Observed During Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl Surveys, By Month, From 1990-2005

