

**Arkansas Game & Fish Commission**  
**Wildlife Management Division**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

TO: Doyle Shook, Chief Wildlife  
FROM: Andrew James, Waterfowl Biologist  
DATE: 16 November 2005  
SUBJECT: November Waterfowl Survey

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Aerial waterfowl surveys were conducted on 7 November through 11 November 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 during the surveys with temperatures ranging from lows in the low 40's to highs in the 70's. Visibility was good during all of the days surveyed.

Wetland conditions across the entire state were much worse than last year. With the extremely dry summer most farmers have finished harvesting their crops. However, very few had begun pumping up areas for duck hunting. It also appears that fewer duck clubs than usual are pumping water due to the extremely dry conditions. The lack of surface water coupled with the high costs of pump fuel appears to be limiting this activity. Most of the recent rainfall was immediately absorbed into the ground and little runoff was created.

This survey was conducted at about the same time as last year's survey. The numbers of waterfowl counted on this year's survey were much lower than last years. The statewide total duck count of 156,896 represented a 71% decrease from last year's count of 540,184. The count in 2002, 731,444, was the highest in the past five years. The other totals from the previous 4 years were 275,444 in 2003, 492,539 in 2001, and 358,018 in 2000. This year's total is actually the lowest ever observed in the 20 year history of this survey. The closest count to this came in 1999 when 199,925 ducks were observed. The total number of ducks observed was almost 67 percent below the November survey five-year average of 479,504 ducks.

The mallard count of 43,085 is 85 percent less than last year's count of 287,482, 81 percent below the five-year average of 232,054 and 82 percent below the 10-year average of 242,317. This year's mallard total is the lowest ever seen during the November survey. Mallard numbers normally peak in Arkansas during the December

aerial surveys so it will be interesting to see if these numbers rebound later in the season. It is interesting to note that some of the lowest counts we have ever seen came during the late 1990's, when duck hunting in the natural state was at its best.

Gadwall, usually the second most abundant species observed during our aerial surveys, outnumbered mallards this time with a survey total of 52,513 60 percent below last year's count. Snow Goose numbers (61,175) were 70 percent below last year's count. Numbers of white-fronted geese, 21,105, were down 51 percent from 43,450 in 2003.

The Arkansas November 2005 survey results are extremely low (Table 3). Reduced early numbers are undoubtedly due to the poor habitat conditions here in Arkansas and the warm fall weather the north central US has been experiencing. Variation in monthly surveys is normal and very apparent when looking at the results of past aerial surveys but this November's survey is out of the realm of normal variation (Table 4.). It will be interesting to see how these numbers change through the season.

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](http://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 during the November 2005 Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl survey

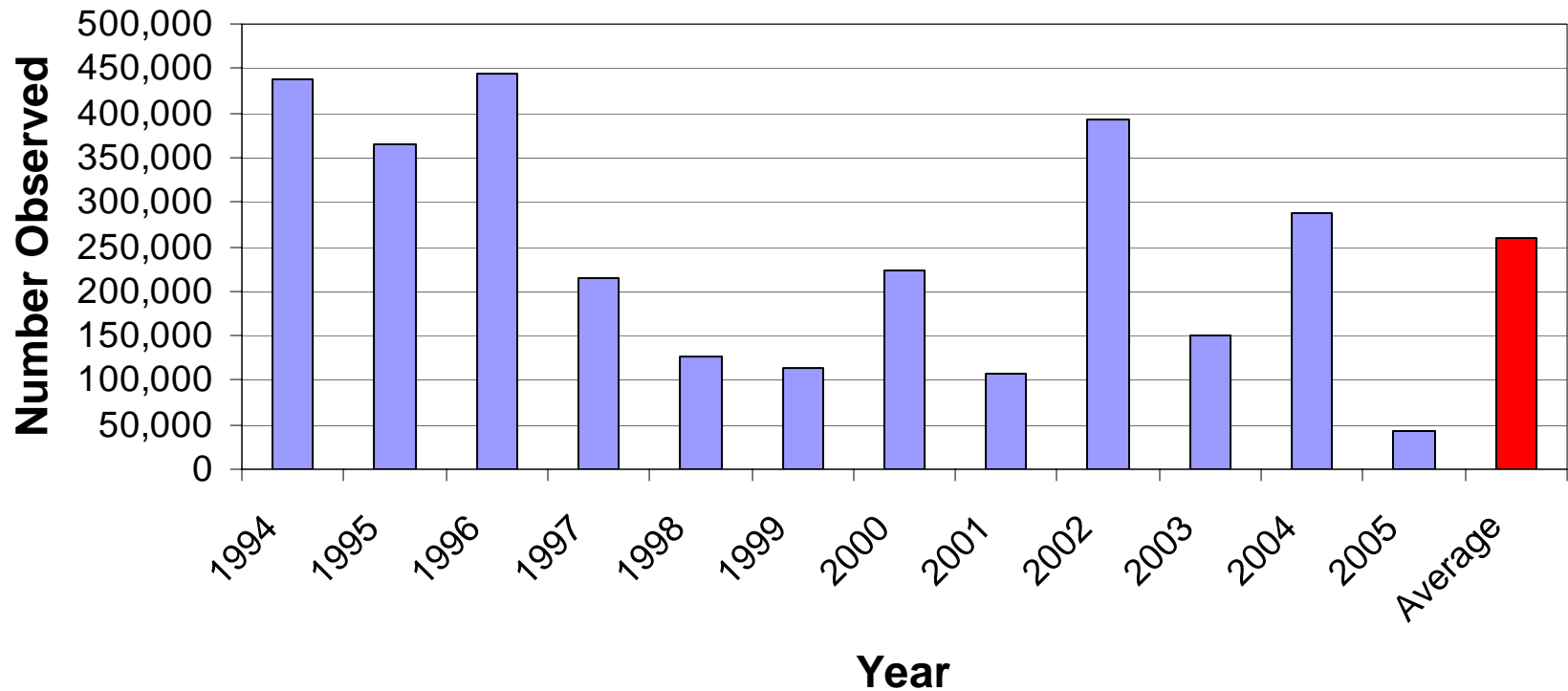
<b>Species</b>	<b>NW AR River</b>	<b>Southwest</b>	<b>Northeast</b>	<b>East Central</b>	<b>Grand Prairie</b>	<b>Southeast</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
Mallard	3430	5040	18047	300	4200	12068	<b>43085</b>
Black Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Gadwall	3500	9065	25393	150	200	14105	<b>52413</b>
Wigeon	350	1565	840	100	300	167	<b>3322</b>
G.W. Teal	5825	375	12380	100	200	1583	<b>20463</b>
B.W. Teal	0	200	0	0	0	0	<b>200</b>
N. Shoveler	4500	675	5305	50	50	1471	<b>12051</b>
N. Pintail	1600	20	19250	50	600	1031	<b>22551</b>
Wood Duck	75	0	0	0	0	0	<b>75</b>
<b><u>ALL DABLERS</u></b>	<b>19280</b>	<b>16940</b>	<b>81215</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>5550</b>	<b>30425</b>	<b>154160</b>

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Ruddy	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Redhead	0	20	0	0	0	0	<b>20</b>
Canvasback	0	0	25	0	0	0	<b>25</b>
Scaup	0	0	250	0	1000	381	<b>1631</b>
Ring-necked	50	0	600	0	0	220	<b>870</b>
Bufflehead	0	0	0	0	0	285	<b>285</b>
Mergansers	0	0	5	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
<b><u>ALL DIVERS</u></b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>2836</b>

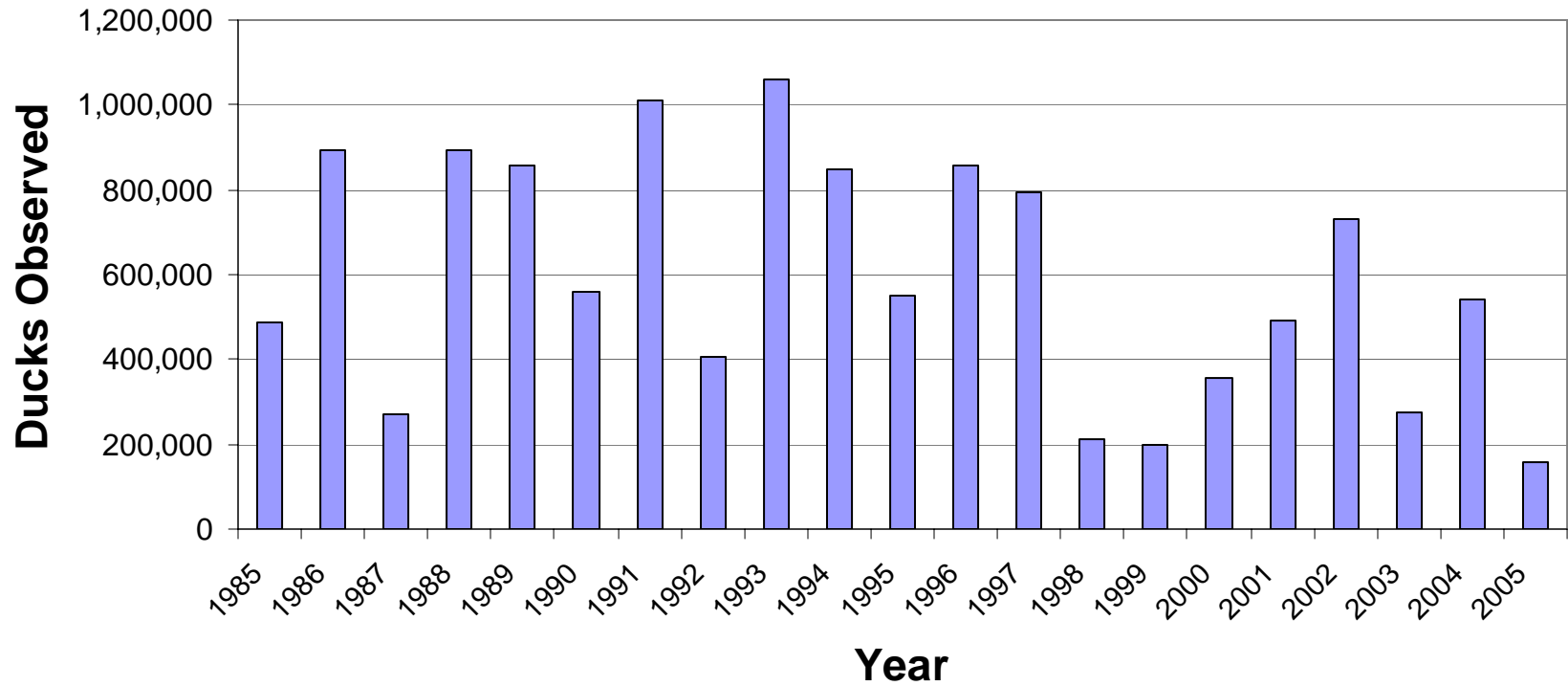
<b>Species</b>	<b>NW AR River</b>	<b>Southwest</b>	<b>Northeast</b>	<b>East Central</b>	<b>Grand Prairie</b>	<b>Southeast</b>	<b>Statewide</b>
Snow/Ross' G.	0	75	24625	0	6250	30225	<b>61175</b>
White-fronted G.	0	575	5700	0	0	14830	<b>21105</b>
Canada Geese	1000	140	141	0	0	38	<b>1319</b>
<b><u>ALL GEESE</u></b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>30466</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6250</b>	<b>45093</b>	<b>83599</b>

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Coot	4200	30	2500	0	0	75	<b>6805</b>
Pelican	250	1018	0	0	0	1085	<b>2353</b>
Eagle	1	0	0	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Cormorants	10500	209	0	0	0	105	<b>10814</b>

**Table 2. Mallards Observed During November  
Arkansas Aerial Surveys 1994 - 2005**



**Table 3. All Ducks Observed During November  
Arkansas Aerial Surveys 1985 - 2005**



**Table 4. All Ducks Observed During Arkansas Aerial Surveys 1985 - 2005, by Month**

