

November 2008 Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl Survey Summary

AGFC personnel conducted aerial waterfowl surveys November 3rd through November 7th in the following regions: Northeast, East Central, Northwest Arkansas River Valley, Southwest, and Southeast. Temperatures were average or above average throughout the week, with a noticeable drop in daytime highs and nighttime lows following a cold front at the end of the week. Weather conditions were clear throughout the survey period resulting in good visibility. This survey was conducted at a similar time as last year.

Conditions generally were very dry across the state leading to low habitat availability during the survey period. Heavy summer rains substantially delayed crop harvest in much of the state. As a result, many fields typically pumped full at this time remained dry as farmers worked to get crops out and fields prepared. A notable exception is the Grand Prairie portion of the East Central survey region where a good amount of habitat had been made available by private landowners with pumping capability. The dry conditions are similar to the November 2007 survey period with the exception of the Northeast survey region where conditions were wet last year.

The statewide total duck count of 418,293 represents a modest 8% increase from last year's count of 388,311. This count is the highest since 2004 but is still below the 1985–2008 November survey average of 564,564 ducks (Figure 1). This November's mallard count of 141,599 is a slight drop (4%) from last year's count of 146,735 and below the long-term average of 268,766 mallards (Figure 2). Mallard numbers were much greater than last year in the East Central survey region with nearly 60% of mallards counted in this region. This observation is not surprising given the relative abundance of flooded habitat present in the Grand Prairie relative to the rest of the state. Snow goose numbers (163,550 this year, 170,770 last year) were similar to last year's count. Counts of white-fronted geese markedly increased again this year, nearly doubling from 58,660 in November 2007 to 150,530 in November 2008. Observers noted about equal numbers of snow and white-fronted geese in the three Delta survey regions with slightly greater numbers in northeast Arkansas. A regional listing of survey totals is found in Table 1.

The November duck count was up again this year; the 2008 count is the second highest since 2003. Several cold fronts during late October appear to have resulted in significant waterfowl migration events but early duck numbers likely are not higher because of low habitat availability in the state resulting from a mixture of persistent dry conditions and delayed harvest and flooding. Migrating waterfowl (including good numbers of mallards) responded to relatively favorable habitat conditions in east-central Arkansas and the highest concentrations of birds were seen on large, contiguous blocks of flooded habitat, highlighting the importance of complexes of habitat to attract and hold waterfowl. Of course, October is historically one of the driest months in Arkansas so dry conditions – including on many Wildlife Management Areas – should not come as a complete surprise. Dry Fall weather like we are currently experiencing highlight the importance of private landowners flooding agricultural lands to provide early waterfowl habitat. The majority of AGFC Wildlife Management Areas popular for duck hunting are completely dependent on rainfall and runoff to fill impoundments. Thus, significant rainfall events are needed to flood many areas on WMAs and provide hunting opportunity. Continental duck numbers are down from 2007 due to continued habitat loss and dry conditions of the breeding grounds in the northern U.S. and Canada. Hunters should remain cautiously optimistic that habitat conditions and duck migration events occur at a level that will meet high expectations set after last year's excellent season.

Table 1. Number of waterfowl observed during the November 2008 Arkansas Aerial Waterfowl Survey.

Species	Northwest	Southwest	Northeast	East Central	Southeast	Statewide
Mallard	2440	4825	46,995	82,419	4920	141,599
Black Duck	0	0	10	0	0	10
Gadwall	3205	5885	60,840	45,535	13,065	128,530
Wigeon	1375	0	250	0	100	1725
G.W. Teal	4050	2445	6560	11,110	7920	32,085
B.W. Teal	0	0	0	50	0	50
N. Shoveler	775	0	5610	6220	3040	15,645
N. Pintail	350	240	20,575	38,760	14,310	74,235
Wood Duck	35	0	0	0	0	35
ALL DABBLERS	12,230	13,395	140,840	184,094	43,355	393,914

Species	Northwest	Southwest	Northeast	East Central	Southeast	Statewide
Ruddy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Redhead	0	0	0	0	0	0
Canvasback	0	0	0	4	0	4
Scaup	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ring-necked	2150	0	3325	0	50	5525
Bufflehead	100	0	0	0	0	100
Mergansers	0	0	0	0	0	0
ALL DIVERS	2250	0	3325	4	50	5629

Species	Northwest	Southwest	Northeast	East Central	Southeast	Statewide
Snow/Ross'						
Geese	0	0	59,600	49,100	54,850	163,550
White-fronted						
Geese	0	0	69,100	46,380	35,050	150,530
Canada						
Geese	185	50	235	490	105	1065
ALL GEESE	185	50	128,935	95,970	90,005	315,145

Figure 1. Aerial Waterfowl Survey Statewide Totals for All Ducks, 1985-2008.

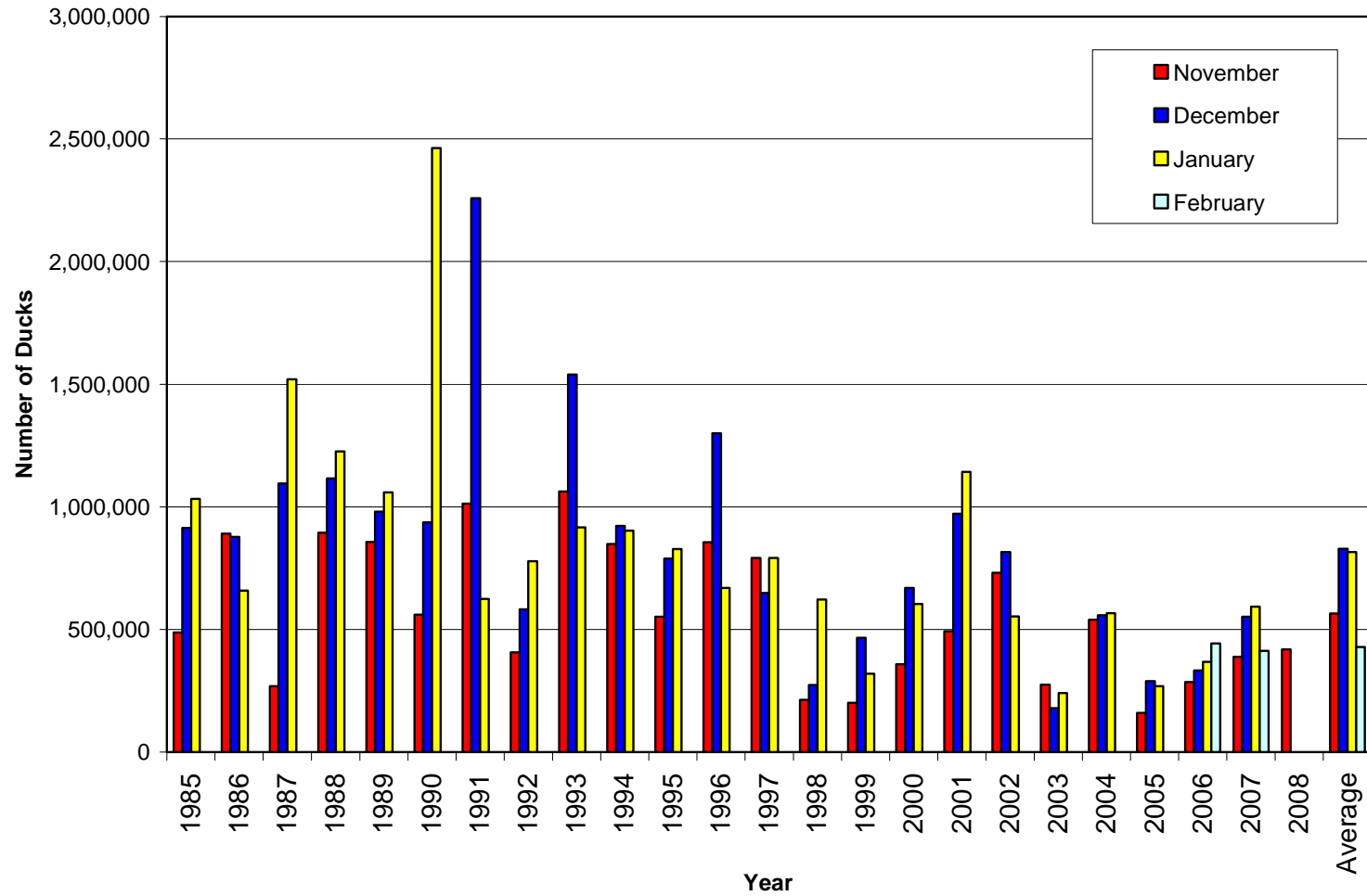


Figure 2. Aerial Waterfowl Survey Statewide Totals for Mallards, 1987-2008.

