



MDWFP Aerial Waterfowl Survey Report

November 13 - 16, 2023



WATERFOWL PROGRAM

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The first MDWFP aerial waterfowl survey of the season occurred November 13 – 16, 2023, and extreme, widespread drought dominated observations across the Mississippi Delta. Shallow, seasonal water was not widely distributed during this survey, and while this is typical for this time of year in Mississippi, these dry conditions were more pronounced. Permanent and semi-permanent wetlands like oxbow lakes and sloughs also held very low water levels (if any) and many were dry. Public lands are currently providing a large proportion of intensively managed waterfowl habitat. As a result, waterfowl are currently responding to these areas, often in high numbers relative to the rest of the Delta. Ducks were also observed using areas with large complexes of managed water across multiple private properties. As a result of the dry fall, most harvested agricultural fields have been disked, which will result in reduced food availability for waterfowl if the fields are eventually flooded. Much opportunity remains for landowners and managers to capture rainfall with water control structures as fall and winter continue along, and as more waterfowl migrate south into the state. As in most years, flooded habitat availability was greatest in the northeast portion of the Delta.

Duck abundance estimates for the Mississippi Delta were well below the November long-term averages for mallards, other dabbling ducks, and diving ducks (Tables 1 and 2). Dabbling ducks other than mallards comprised 46% of all duck observations. Northern shovelers and mallards were the two most abundant dabbling duck species observed overall, respectively. Scaup and ring-necked ducks were the most abundant diving duck species observed. The northeastern portion of the Delta contained the greatest abundances of all duck categories recorded: mallards, other dabblers, diving ducks, and total ducks overall. Low waterfowl numbers during this survey were likely driven by a combination of dry conditions and relatively mild weather, as similar results were observed in other states in the Southeast. On the bright side, survey efforts in several mid-latitude states have recently observed above-average duck numbers, which bodes well for continued southern migrations. Also, Mississippi's November duck estimates are typically not strong indicators of where peak numbers will reach later in the winter.

In the Mississippi Delta, mallards and other dabbling ducks were most commonly observed using permanent water bodies such as brakes and oxbow lakes. It should be noted that very few agricultural fields were flooded during this survey, but available flooded fields were attractive to ducks. And as usual, the greatest abundances of diving ducks were observed on aquaculture complexes. In general, ducks were not evenly distributed across available wetland habitat. Instead, ducks were observed together in relatively large groups, which is typical of early-season behavior in areas with managed complexes of diverse wetland habitat. Biologists expect ducks to begin to distribute further as new wetland habitats become available throughout the winter. Much of the state received much needed rain early this week, but habitat conditions will remain well below average through the early hunting season. No concentrations of light geese (snow, blue, and Ross') or greater white-fronted geese (commonly called specklebellies) were observed during this survey, but recent reports suggest that numbers are increasing.

The regular duck hunting season is set to open Friday, November 24, and MDWFP biologists are optimistic that state WMAs with groundwater pumping capabilities will continue to attract and hold waterfowl for an enjoyable start to the season. Despite low duck numbers overall, WMAs with the ability to manage water can often have great early season hunting success. Temperatures

have cooled following recent rainfall, and the long-range forecast predicts near or slightly below freezing temperatures late next week.

Weekly waterfowl reports will begin the week following the duck season opener, and will include updates from Mississippi hunting reports, as well as weather and habitat conditions. For weekly waterfowl reports, migration forecast information, and more on the MDWFP Waterfowl Program, visit our website at <http://www.mdwfp.com/waterfowl>.

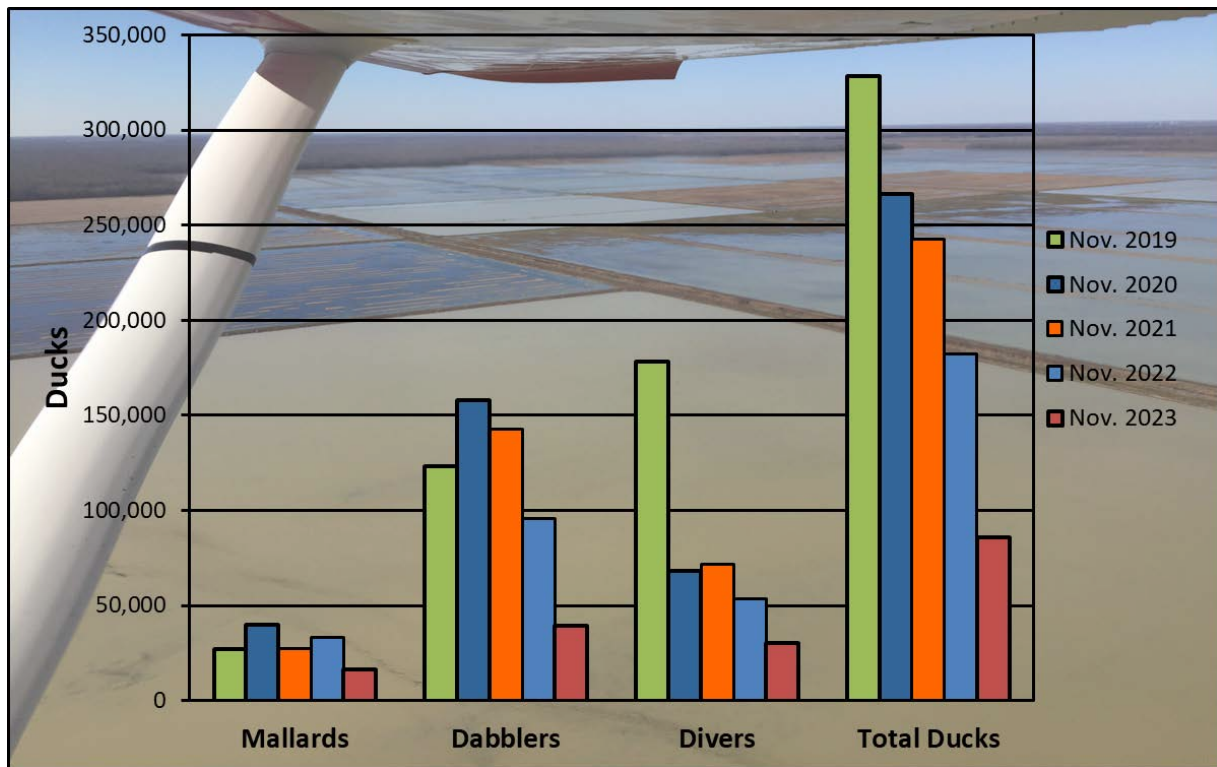
Table 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the November survey periods, 2007-2023.

	Mallards	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks
2007-08	25,872	34,241	27,992	88,106
2008-09	30,748	96,245	105,089	232,081
2009-10	24,281	137,996	77,839	240,117
2010-11	10,481	70,123	100,740	181,344
2011-12	43,845	183,823	80,928	308,596
2012-13	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
2013-14	No survey	No survey	No survey	No survey
2014-15	88,005	229,810	79,400	397,215
2015-16	30,933	57,702	54,167	142,802
2016-17	36,540	212,469	124,240	373,249
2017-18	88,019	303,472	109,101	500,591
2018-19	55,258	103,181	55,932	214,371
2019-20	26,866	123,036	178,488	328,390
2020-21	40,100	157,750	68,343	266,194
2021-22	27,462	142,941	71,940	242,344
2022-23	33,149	95,574	53,346	182,069
2023-24	16,446	39,438	30,152	86,035
Average	38,534	132,520	81,180	252,234

Table 2. Comparison of November 2023 aerial waterfowl survey estimates to the long-term average (LTA) for November survey estimates.

Species Group	November 2023	November LTA	% Change from LTA
Mallards	16,446	38,534	-57%
Other Dabblers	39,438	132,520	-70%
Diving Ducks	30,152	81,180	-63%
Total Ducks	86,035	252,234	-66%

Figure 1. Waterfowl abundance estimates in the Mississippi Delta during the five most recent November survey periods.



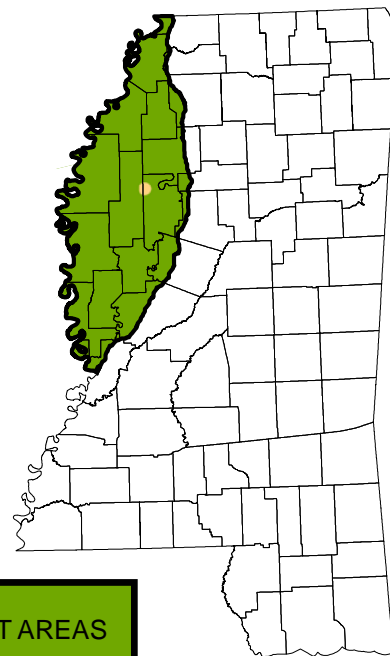
Distribution of Mallards in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 13-16, 2023



Description

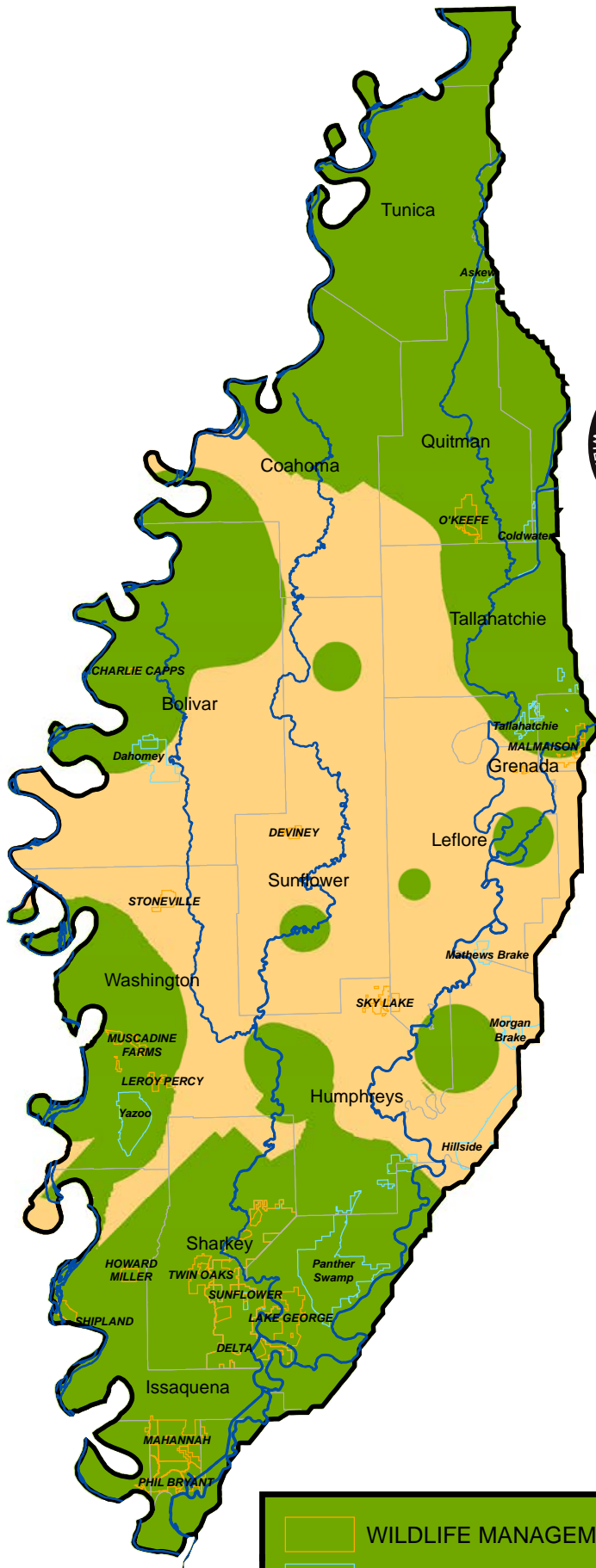
- Low (<12/mi²)
- Medium (12-115/mi²)
- High (>115/mi²)



- WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS
- NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

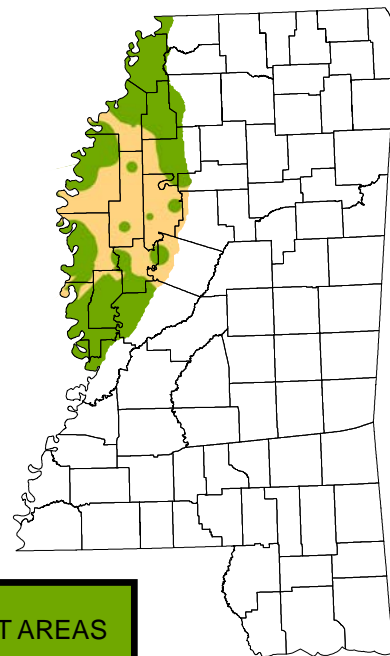
Distribution of Total Ducks in the Mississippi Delta

Nov. 13-16, 2023



Description

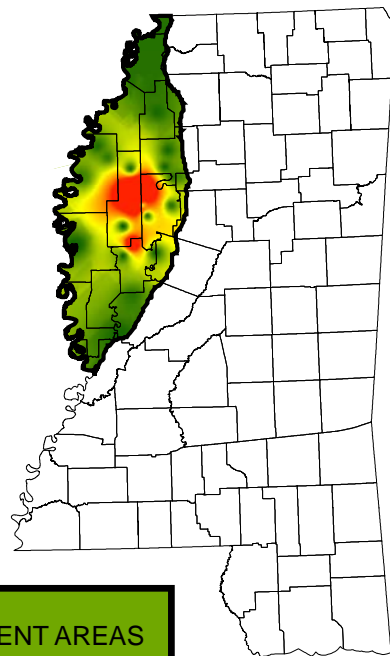
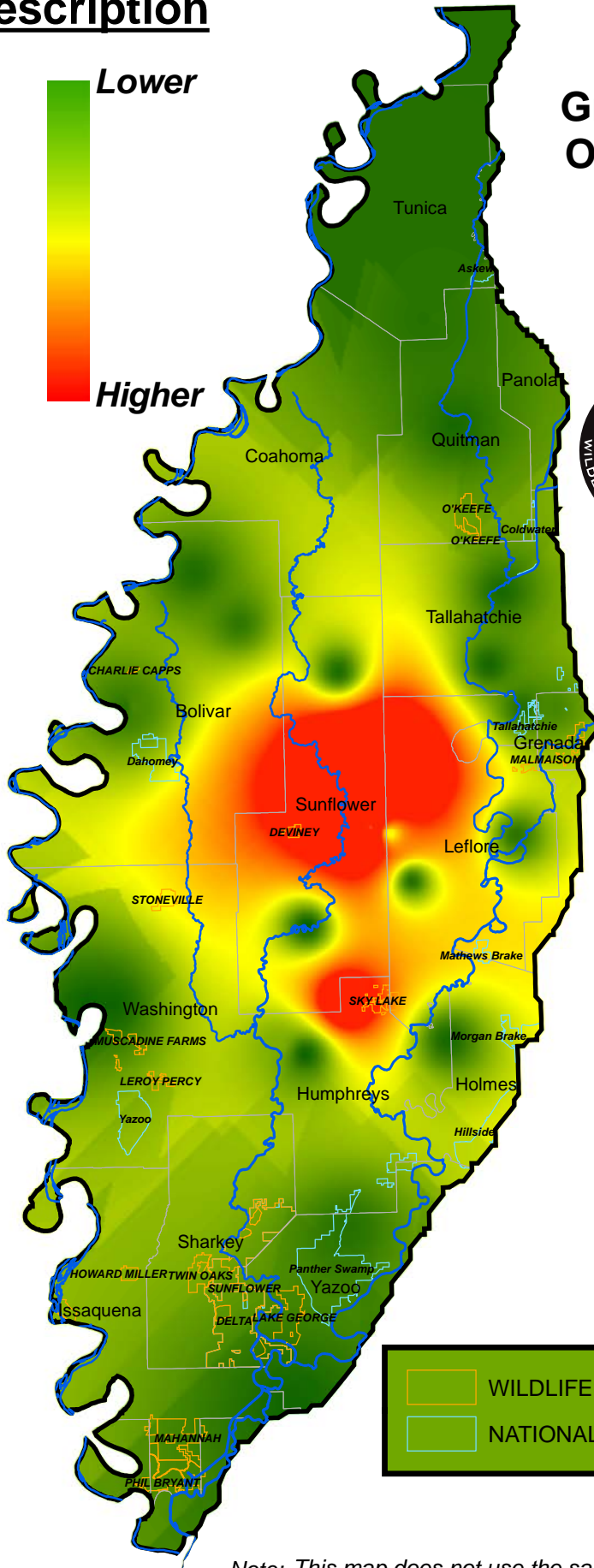
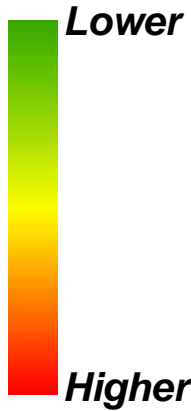
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Description

Greatest Concentrations of Ducks Observed in the Mississippi Delta Nov. 13-16, 2023



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Note: This map does not use the same area calculations as previously published maps and is intended to illustrate major concentrations of ducks in the Mississippi Delta.