

# Kentucky Periodic Waterfowl Inventory

Conducted January 13-15, 2025

This is the 2025 Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey Report, conducted January 13-15. The survey was flown during a polar vortex that brought significantly below-average temperatures and above-average snowfall and ice conditions to Kentucky. This winter has been colder and harsher than usual for the state, marked by sustained cold spells and impactful weather events. Similar harsh conditions have been observed across other states in the Mississippi Flyway, while Canadian provinces within the Flyway have experienced more typical winter weather.

The severe winter conditions across wide swaths of the Flyway have driven waterfowl to move between states more than in warmer years, leading to much variability in population estimates. Total duck numbers, mallard numbers, and goose numbers ranged from record highs in some states to average or below-average levels in others, based on comparisons with 5-, 10-, and 20-year averages.

Kentucky faced significant drought during the summer and fall of 2024. However, most regions of the state recovered early in the winter, and water bodies and impoundments are now generally at full winter pool. Statewide, smaller water bodies and shallow wetlands were predominantly ice-covered during the survey period, limiting available open water for waterfowl. In contrast, larger bodies of water with moving currents, spring-fed waters, and wind-exposed areas remained partially open. These open areas were often concentrated with waterfowl, which helped maintain ice-free holes. Waterfowl habitat across the state was in good condition overall, although ice coverage was extensive in many areas.

This season, hunter activity and duck harvest varied across different areas. Sloughs WMA, for example, experienced a slight increase in both hunter activity and duck harvest compared to previous years. In contrast, Ballard and Boatwright WMAs saw a slight decline in hunter activity, with a more noticeable drop in duck harvest. Although the persistent cold weather prompted ducks to move more frequently in search of food, thermal cover, and safety from hunters – unlike in milder winters when waterfowl can remain more stationary – this movement did not necessarily result in higher harvest rates or more successful hunts.

Listed below are the individual survey data obtained during our Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey across the state.  
We hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable waterfowl season!



PC: Gary Kramer

**Mid-Winter Survey Report for Western Kentucky – Purchase Region**

*Flown by: Pat Hahs on January 15, 2025*

| <b>Site</b>                    | <b>Dabblers</b> | <b>Divers</b> | <b>Total Ducks</b> | <b>Canada geese</b> | <b>Snow/Blue geese</b> | <b>WF geese</b> | <b>Coots</b> | <b>Eagles</b> | <b>Sandhill Cranes</b> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|------------------------|
| Bayou de Chien                 | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Obion Creek                    | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Mississippi River              | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Mayfield Creek                 | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Reelfoot NWR                   | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Ballard                        | 43430           | 1250          | 44680              | 0                   | 18000                  | 8000            | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Boatwright WMA                 | 34000           | 3200          | 37200              | 0                   | 38500                  | 2200            | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Ohio River (Wickliffe-Paducah) | 140             | 0             | 140                | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Ohio River (Paducah-Golconda)  | 11710           | 2100          | 13810              | 0                   | 0                      | 4500            | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Barkley Lake (N of 68)         | 1005            | 730           | 1735               | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Barkley Lake (S of 68)         | 0               | 30            | 30                 | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Duck Island                    | 1585            | 0             | 1585               | 250                 | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Kentucky Lake                  | 115             | 2645          | 2760               | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Kaler Bottoms                  | 0               | 0             | 0                  | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Birdsville Islands             | 150             | 0             | 150                | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| Doug Travis WMA                | 2200            | 0             | 2200               | 0                   | 0                      | 0               | 0            | 0             | 0                      |
| <b>Totals</b>                  | <b>94335</b>    | <b>9955</b>   | <b>104290</b>      | <b>250</b>          | <b>56500</b>           | <b>14700</b>    | <b>0</b>     | <b>0</b>      | <b>0</b>               |

**Notes from Pat:** Recent very cold conditions seemed to have moved birds in. Very good numbers of mallards were noted on the upper Ohio River near Birdsville Island. The estimated canvasback numbers in that area were about as high as I have observed. Most waterfowl observed were in tight densities on ice where open holes existed. A good portion of the birds listed from Paducah to Golconda were using a private wetland near the confluence of the Ohio and TN Rivers. Birds seemed to be content remaining fairly inactive, at least at the time of the survey. Some hunters were observed, but many unoccupied blind sites. With the ice, habitat conditions could be considered compromised.

**Mid-Winter Survey Report for Lower Ohio River & Western Coalfield**

*Flown by: Thomas Young & Weston Mason on January 14, 2025*

| Site   | Dabblers     | Divers     | Total Ducks  | Canada geese | Snow/Blue geese | WF geese    | Coots    | Eagles   | Sandhill Cranes |
|--|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Ohio River (Owensboro-Green River)                         | 52           | 3          | 55           | 72           | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Green River-Henderson)                         | 0            | 0          | 0            | 0            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Henderson-Sloughs WMA)                         | 0            | 0          | 0            | 120          | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Sloughs WMA  | 5700         | 0          | 5700         | 0            | 5840            | 1150        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (GPPL & JHHC)                                   | 0            | 0          | 0            | 0            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Uniontown-Shawneetown)                         | 50           | 0          | 50           | 0            | 75              | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Shawneetown-Tradewater River)                  | 100          | 0          | 100          | 0            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Tradewater River-east end of Hurricane Island) | 19           | 0          | 19           | 0            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Hurricane Island-Golconda)                     | 60           | 21         | 81           | 20           | 25              | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Hovey Lake WMA (Indiana)                                   | 1230         | 0          | 1230         | 10           | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Pond River-White City WMA                                  | 3            | 50         | 53           | 25           | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Tradewater River   | 2000         | 0          | 2000         | 2            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Peabody Coal Property                                      | 1265         | 175        | 1440         | 427          | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Rough River  | 5            | 0          | 5            | 10           | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Yellowbank WMA   | 210          | 0          | 210          | 0            | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Brandenburg-Owensboro)                         | 70           | 0          | 70           | 85           | 0               | 0           | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Totals</b>  | <b>10764</b> | <b>249</b> | <b>11013</b> | <b>771</b>   | <b>5940</b>     | <b>1150</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b>        |

**Notes from Thomas/Weston:** Significant freezing of tributaries and surface water along route. Majority of ducks extremely concentrated in pockets of open water. All moist soil and floodable habitat at Sloughs at or above full pool. Tradewater seemingly had extensive acreage flooded along the river.

## Mid-Winter Survey Report for Central and Eastern Kentucky

*Flown by: Wes Little on January 13, 2025*

| Site                              | Dabblers    | Divers     | Total Ducks | Canada geese | Snow/Blue geese | WF geese | Coots    | Eagles   | Sandhill Cranes |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Barren River Lake                 | 86          | 16         | 184         | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 1        | 14              |
| Bluegrass Army Depot              | 25          | 0          | 25          | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Campbell County Lake              | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Cave Run Lake                     | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Cedar Creek Lake                  | 25          | 0          | 25          | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Dale Hollow Lake                  | 36          | 2          | 38          | 15           | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Grayson Lake                      | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Green River Lake                  | 26          | 0          | 26          | 11           | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Herrington Lake                   | 9           | 0          | 9           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Kincaid Lake                      | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Lake Cumberland                   | 79          | 125        | 239         | 75           | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Licking River North               | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Licking River South               | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Ashland-Portsmouth)   | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Ohio River (Louisville-Warsaw)    | 765         | 435        | 1200        | 1764         | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 25              |
| Ohio River (Warsaw-Licking River) | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Scioto River                      | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Taylorsville Lake                 | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| Yatesville Lake                   | 0           | 0          | 0           | 0            | 0               | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0               |
| <b>Totals</b>                     | <b>1051</b> | <b>578</b> | <b>1746</b> | <b>1865</b>  | <b>0</b>        | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>39</b>       |

**Notes from Wes:** Survey completed after a strong cold front that included several inches of snow, ice, and rain. Most reservoirs were at winter pool and had 10%-40% ice cover. Habitat and water conditions were excellent in natural wetlands, moist soil units and flooded crop units, though all shallow and wind protected bodies of water were 100% ice covered. The most abundant dabbling ducks were mallards, followed by black ducks & gadwall. Green-winged teal were the only other noted puddle ducks. Ring-necked ducks were the most noted diving ducks, followed by canvasback and redhead, and these were mostly noted in just a couple large rafts. There were a handful of bufflehead and goldeneye noted, but not many. Canada geese were the only goose species noted during the survey, and there just a couple groups of Sandhill cranes noted. The Ohio River level was normal for this time of year and was free of ice. Each year, fewer ash ponds are noted on the power plants and waterfowl use declines. Two power plants on the Central Route only had one pond and zero ducks. All other habitat outside the banks of the river looked good, but was 100% ice covered.

Eastern route could not be flown this year due to weather constraints.