

Kentucky Periodic Waterfowl Inventory

Conducted January 5-12, 2026

Report Date: January 20, 2026

This is the 2026 Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey Report, conducted January 5-12. The 2025–26 waterfowl season in Kentucky has been shaped primarily by persistent dry conditions and generally mild temperatures from late November through mid-January. Extended periods of above-average temperatures limited the development of ice across much of the state for most of the season, with only brief cold snaps producing ice on small ponds, shallow wetlands, and wind-protected areas. Larger lakes and major rivers remained largely ice-free throughout the season. Similar mild and relatively dry winter conditions were observed across much of the Mississippi Flyway, while northern portions of the Flyway experienced more typical winter weather.

Kentucky experienced drought conditions earlier in 2025, and limited precipitation continued into the hunting season, resulting in reduced water availability across the landscape. Most lakes remain at or below winter pool, and water levels on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers are well below typical early-winter stages, limiting backwater flooding and access to traditional floodplain habitats. As a result, wetlands and bottomland areas that typically hold waterfowl during the winter are largely dry, and usable water is primarily confined to pumped wetlands, managed impoundments, and isolated ponds, where habitat conditions are generally fair to good.

Throughout the season, waterfowl have been widely dispersed across available water rather than concentrated in large numbers, reflecting both limited habitat availability and the lack of sustained cold weather to drive major movements. Species composition remain generally typical for this time of year, and no widespread north-to-south or south-to-north redistributions have been apparent. Some localized concentrations of snow geese were observed earlier than historically typical, though these numbers remain highly dynamic. Overall, hunter activity and harvest appears variable but generally modest, with anecdotal reports indicating slower hunting in many areas, likely influenced more by limited water availability and bird distribution than by weather severity.

Listed below are the individual survey data obtained during our Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey across the state. We hope everyone has 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 5, 2026

Site	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks	Canada geese	Snow/Blue geese	WF geese	Coots	Eagles	Sandhill Cranes
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 WMA	17362	620	17982	70	45000	300	0	0	0
Boatwright WMA	520	1380	1900	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Wickliffe-Paducah)	300	0	300	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Paducah-Golconda)	4343	1362	5715	25	0	0	0	0	0
Barkley Lake (N of 68)	185	3610	3795	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barkley Lake (S of 68)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Duck Island	1008	0	1008	80	0	90	0	0	0
Kentucky Lake	0	990	990	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kaler Bottoms	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Birdsville Islands	1425	0	1425	0	0	0	0	0	0
Doug Travis WMA	125	0	125	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	25268	7962	33240	175	45000	390	0	0	0

Notes from Pat:

Species composition is generally normal for the time of year. Despite recent warm weather, a significant movement of birds from south to north wasn't apparent, yet. Weather at the time of the survey was noticeably mild. Temperatures were approximately 15-20 degrees above normal. It remains very dry, overall. Water on the landscape was primarily from pumped sources. The Mississippi and Lower Ohio River levels were as low as we have seen for an early January survey. The Cairo, IL river stage was ~12.5 feet at the time of survey and forecast to drop below 10 within a few days. Flood stage is 40 feet and levels in the low 30's start backing water into the lowest flats of the tributaries.

Snow goose numbers in the Ballard complex were good. That is always a dynamic number, though. It seems a bit early for numbers like that, at least historically. We have seen that for at least a few years, now. Few hunters were observed. Anecdotal reports are that hunting has been slow. Where water existed, habitat conditions were fair/good. Unfortunately, there wasn't much water anywhere outside pumped locations since rainfall has been minimal for the duration of the waterfowl season.

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

Flown by: Thomas Young & Keith Syers on January 5, 2026

Site	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks	Canada geese	Snow/Blue geese	WF geese	Coots	Eagles	Sandhill Cranes
Ohio River (Owensboro-Green River)	10	53	63	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Green River-Henderson)	20	0	20	37	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Henderson-Sloughs WMA)	0	0	0	0	3800	0	0	0	0
Sloughs WMA	5102	0	5102	0	7100	1850	0	5	0
Ohio River (GPPL & JHHC)	0	0	0	0	5500	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Uniontown-Shawneetown)	20	0	20	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ohio River (Shawneetown-Tradewater River)	28	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Tradewater River-east end of Hurricane Island)	10	0	10	0	0	0	0	1	0
Ohio River (Hurricane Island-Golconda)	30	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hovey Lake WMA (Indiana)	8800	0	8800	0	0	0	0	1	0
Pond River-White City WMA	38	0	38	20	0	0	0	0	0
Tradewater River	1059	0	1059	200	0	0	400	0	0
Peabody Coal Property	108	25	133	280	0	0	0	0	0
Rough River	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yellowbank WMA	222	0	222	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Brandenburg-Owensboro)	10	0	10	28	0	0	0	3	0
Totals	15457	78	15535	565	16400	1850	400	11	0

Notes from Thomas/Keith:

Above average temperatures persist and dry conditions. Majority of ducks were concentrated on Hovey and Sloughs in existing water. Most BLH systems dry. All moist soil and floodable habitat at Sloughs and Hovey Lake at or above full pool. Remaining area of survey was drier than normal. Ohio River was at normal pool with MSU marginally full with relatively dry conditions. Entire survey route was ice free. Above average temps during and prior to survey.

Mid-Winter Survey Report for Central and Eastern Kentucky

Flown by: Wes Little on January 7, 8, and 12, 2026

Site	Dabblers	Divers	Total Ducks	Canada geese	Snow/Blue geese	WF geese	Coots	Eagles	Sandhill Cranes
Barren River Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Blue Grass Army Depot	456	191	647	121	0	0	0	0	1
Campbell County Lake	20	0	20	25	0	0	0	0	0
Cave Run Lake	4	46	50	44	0	0	0	0	0
Cedar Creek Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dale Hollow Lake	99	15	114	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grayson Lake	60	54	114	19	0	0	0	0	2
Green River Lake	16	76	92	0	0	0	12	0	0
Herrington Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kincaid Lake	22	32	54	5	0	0	0	0	0
Lake Cumberland	29	0	29	100	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)	54	0	54	23	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio River (Louisville-Warsaw)	489	283	772	1025	55	0	0	0	5
Ohio River (Warsaw-Licking River)	662	96	774	1064	0	0	0	0	1
Scioto River	13	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	1
Taylorsville Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Yatesville Lake	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	1924	793	2733	2426	55	0	12	0	12

Notes from Wes:

Survey began on Thursday, January 7, 2026. Dry conditions persist and temps were slightly above average for this time of year. No ice was noted during the survey. Lakes were all either at or below winter pool, the wetlands and flooded areas in the Scioto River bottoms were nearly nonexistent, and the Ohio River was significantly lower than normal for this survey. Ducks and geese seemed to be scattered abundantly on the ponds and wetlands around the lakes and rivers that had some water and not really congregating in any particular area. The notable exception was the Blue Grass Army Depot, which had ample water and abundant numbers of ducks and geese.

Survey began on Thursday, January 8, 2026. Winds started out fairly calm but increased throughout the day, and the survey was halted after finishing Green River Lake WMA. Dry conditions persist. Lakes were all either at or below winter pool. Cedar Creek Lake was noticeably lower than winter pool due to habitat work through the fisheries division. Ponds and wetlands around the lakes and rivers mostly had some water, and ducks and geese seemed to be scattered abundantly and not really congregating in any particular area.

Taylorsville Lake WMA and the Ohio River were flown on Monday, January 12, 2026. Temps were in the low 20's all night and throughout the last portion of the survey. Ice was covering all small ponds, wetlands and depressions in wind protected areas and that had water. The lakes and the River remained ice free. Taylorsville Lake was at or below winter pool elevation, and the Ohio River was significantly lower than normal for this survey.