

November 21, 2019 Kentucky Waterfowl Ground Counts

This is the first waterfowl ground count of the 2019/2020 wintering period. If weather predictions hold true, we expect an exciting opening day! This year has been a year of extremes. Flooding that began last duck season persisted into mid-July along the big rivers, especially on areas along the lower Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. When the rain finally stopped... it stopped for two months (+/- check local listings). Rains picked back up this fall, just in time for an early arctic blast to hit in early November.

Habitat across the state varies from excellent to poor, with most areas on the high side of the scale. Many areas along the big rivers or at Duck Island do not have grain crops for waterfowl food plots this year. The flooding persisted so long that crops either could not be planted or did not do well by being planted so late. Again, this varies. Most areas were able to plant some crops, and several stands did well... but there are many spots that the crops either were not planted were out competed by native moist soil vegetation. The extreme weather did however invigorate the moist soil vegetation that grows naturally in these wet areas. Moist soil plants, which are the backbone of waterfowl management, thrived this year! Wild Millets, Panic grass, Sprangletop, sedges, smartweeds and toothcup thrived, leaving impressive amounts of food available this winter. Moist soil plants provide more protein and amino acids than any crop can produce. The bugs and invertebrates that inhabit these plants are also extremely important forage. Wetland conditions and food availability are set for a productive waterfowl season.

Duck season will begin on Thanksgiving Day, with the first segment running from November 28 – December 1. The second segment of duck season opens on December 7th, and NEW THIS YEAR, will run until January 31, 2020. Goose season will open November 28, 2019 and will remain open until February 15, 2020. The western zone youth hunt will be February 1-2, 2020. Also new this year is the daily bag limit reduction from 2 birds to 1 for Northern Pintail. All other bag limits remain the same.

We wish everyone great luck this year. Be safe, and enjoy your time afield.

Location	Number	Species Composition	Comments
Ballard	18,074 ducks 58 CAGO 10 White-fronts	96% Mallard, 2% GW Teal 2% mixed Gadwall, Wood Duck, Pintail, Black Duck, Ring-neck, Ruddy and Hooded Merganser	Habitat on Ballard is looking great. We have an abundance of moist soil vegetation. Thursday morning to Friday morning, we received over 2 inches of rain leaving water ponding in fields and creating new loafing/foraging areas. Ducks are spread out across entire area.
Boatwright	969 Ducks	99% Mallard, 1% Gadwall, Wood duck and Black Duck	Birds were holding tight to cover making an accurate survey difficult. Good water levels in most areas, & abundant food availability with moist soil and crops. Overall, habitat looks good throughout WMA.

<p>Duck Island</p>	<p>~ 3300 ducks</p>	<p>95% Mallards 4% Ringneck 1% GWT, PIN, BUF, BLK, RUD</p>	<p>Water conditions are good. Habitat this year is fair. Very late flood followed by a drought resulted in poor response even by normally reliable natural vegetation. ~40 acres of Japanese millet was seeded, but germination and growth was poor.</p> <p>We have plenty of water stockpiled for our planned gradual increase in shallow flooded acres. Water levels at the moment within the island can be considered normal.</p>
<p>Doug Travis WMA</p>	<p>4,550 Ducks</p>	<p>95% Mallard, 5% mixed dabblers</p>	<p>It was difficult to accurately count ducks in Beaver Pond and in parts of Indian Camp due to the amount of flooded natural vegetation where the ducks are concentrating. All blind site units are flooded and ready to hunt. Baldy's Woods, Ward Tract, and Milner WRP walk-in units are flooded. We have started letting water into the Fish Lake Greentree impoundment. Indian Camp Rest Area impoundments are 60% flooded & we are holding the rest to prevent early seed decomposition.</p>
<p>Sloughs WMA</p>			

Peabody WMA	732 ducks 142 Canada geese	516 divers, 216 dabblers	Moist soil unit water is low in many units. Natural systems have typical water levels.
Yellowbank WMA	225 Ducks	60% Wood Duck, 40% Mallard, 1 Sandhill Crane	Excellent moist soil plant response and standing corn in most units. A couple of units are holding 25% water capacity from rains. Pumps are running to have several acres of water before Thanksgiving opener.
Barren River WMA	0 ducks, 70 Canada Geese		Need a runoff rain event to get MSUs filled up before season opener, Peters Creek MSU 20% full, Long Creek- Calvert Springs main unit 90%, other units 0-40% full
Blue Grass Army Depot (all lakes and ponds)			
Herrington Lake			
Cave Run Lake	Several hundred Ducks, Several hundred Canada Geese	Hooded Merganser - 10 Mallard - 6 Pied Bill Grebe - 1 Western Grebe – 2 Rest Unknown	Several large rafts of ducks floating all across the Zilpo Flats. Was not able to get close enough to get ID this week.