

December 12, 2019 Kentucky Waterfowl Ground Counts

This the waterfowl ground survey for December 9-12, 2019. The Ohio and Mississippi River levels are finally receding, opening some of the roads back up on our westernmost WMA's. The backwater areas are receding, but there is still an abundance of sheet-water found in low areas. Duck numbers seem to be holding steady throughout most of the state. Boatwright WMA had a huge increase of birds on the area during the survey! As weather and habitat conditions change, look for birds to adapt as well. There is rain/snow in the forecast as this southerly front gives way to new weather from the west, so be ready to take advantage of waterfowl movements during this weather change.

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 began on Thanksgiving Day, with the first segment running from November 28 – December 1. The second segment of duck season opened on December 7th, and NEW THIS YEAR, will run until January 31, 2020. Goose season opened 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 <i>12/13/2019</i>	21,968 ducks 96 CA geese 2,650 WF geese	97% Mallard, 1% Gadwall, 2% Ring-neck, Scaup, Wigeon, Black Duck, Hooded Merganser, Wood Duck, Green-wing, Ruddy, and Shoveler.	Ducks are holding tight in refuge areas. We opened to hunting last Saturday, and harvest numbers have varied. Ohio River is currently at 33 ft and dropping. Water is moving out of areas where the river had backed water in. Moist soil food is abundant, and what small grains we were able to plant look great as well. Have had a full moon this week, as well as some freezing on shallow water, and I believe that has pushed ducks into feeding later

			and loafing during the day.
Boatwright <i>12/13/2019</i>	49,044 Ducks	74% Mallard, 12% Ring-neck, 5% Green-wing, 3% Pintail, 6% mixed Bufflehead, Wigeon, Canvasback, Gadwall, Goldeneye, and a few unknown divers	Water levels have been high on most of Boatwright, for a couple weeks. Water is moving back out to the River and is helping to pull ducks back to the area. Waterfowl are moving back into the lakes and sloughs. Most birds were observed using moist-soil units and loafing areas around Swan Lake. Harvest numbers have varied daily due to full moon and some freezing of shallow water.
Duck Island <i>12/4/2019</i>	2300 ducks	98% Mallards 2% Pintail, Ringneck, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Gadwall	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.
Doug Travis WMA <i>12/11/2019</i>	2900 Ducks	90% Mallard, 10% mixed dabblers Much of the area south of Fish Lake Road could not be surveyed due to flooding.	The river has subsided and is looking like it will stay in the 35' range; this river level will potentially cause road flooding when traveling to blinds 16 and 17 and also cause units south of Fish Lake road to potentially have overtopped levee's thus creating deeper than normal wading situations. Water north of Fish Lake road has mostly subsided but there could be deeper

			than normal water in spots created by beaver dams and levees. As always, use caution when wading and driving through water across roads. 3, 4, and 10).
Sloughs WMA 12/11/2019	12,750 ducks 205 CA geese 0 WF geese 0 snows 245 Tundra swans	92% Mallard, 5% Gadwall, 3% greenwing teal, widgeon, black ducks and pintail	Habitat on Sloughs is looking very good. We have had increasing amounts of usable habitat on the area due to recent rainfall. Although at the time of the survey it showed zero Snow Geese or White Fronted Geese, there is an abundance of each using the area at any given time.
Peabody WMA 12/12/2019	704 ducks 135 Canada geese	90% Mallards, 10% gadwall, teal, wigeon, ring-necked duck.	All moist soil units are full of water. Water levels are still high over most of the area which seems to have many of the ducks in back water.
Yellowbank WMA 12/10/2019	500 Ducks	85% Mallard, 5% pintail, 5% wood duck, & 5% other.	Excellent moist soil plant response and standing corn in most units. All units are at maximum capacity.
Barren River Lake WMA 12/12/2019	275 ducks 55 CA geese 787 Sandhill Cranes	80/20 dabblers and divers Mallards, shovelers, wood ducks, redheads and hooded mergansers noted.	Lake level is 540.1 (+12.4). Peters Creek MSU 80% full, Long Creek- Calvert Springs main unit 100%, other units 75-80% full.
Blue Grass Army Depot (all lakes and ponds) 12/3/2019	9 bufflehead 8 CA geese		
Herrington Lake	<i>not surveyed</i>		

Cave Run Lake <i>12/10/2019</i>	257 Ducks 100 CA Geese 6 Swan 20 Coots	50 bufflehead, 30 canvasback, 20 ruddy ducks, 7 Gadwall and 2 ringnecked suck. Also 150 unidentified ducks rafted on the main lake, probably divers.	Lake is at 728'.
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