

December 5, 2019 Kentucky Waterfowl Ground Counts

Freezing temps at night, and cool daytime temps have everyone hopeful for an exciting opener to the second segment of the KY duck season. There is an abundance of water on the landscape, brought by a large rain event over the weekend. In fact, the Ohio River is at flood stage, and is already threatening to close Ballard WMA. Boatwright and Doug Travis WMA's have roads that currently cannot be accessed. Rules for hunting in flood conditions are in the waterfowl guide available online. At Doug Travis, blind owners' rights and standby procedures for designated blind sites will remain unchanged during high water, including for hunters using boats to access sites normally reached by walking or wading. On impoundments with designated blind sites, waterfowl hunters must hunt within 10 yards of the designated blind site, even during high water. Walk-in hunting units will remain open to walk-in/boat-in hunting as appropriate and closed rest area boundaries will remain in effect during high water. We urge hunters to use extra caution when wading or boating during high water, and to always check water depths before driving a vehicle or launching boats where water covers roads.

Duck numbers seem to be holding steady, and there are more mallards staging to our north waiting for some winter weather to send them south. Staff in Missouri have noticed the species composition changing to mostly mallards, meaning most of the early migrants have moved on. Cross your fingers for colder temps to the north, and in the meantime take advantage of the flooded conditions that are providing new food sources.

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 opens 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 11/27/2019 Flooding made this week's survey impossible.	15,000 ducks 117 CA geese 1150 WF geese	96% Mallard, 2% GW Teal 2% mixed Gadwall, Wood Duck, Pintail, Black Duck, Ring-neck, Ruddy and Hooded Merganser	The Ohio River is at flood stage. Watch the Ballard WMA Facebook page or the KDFWR website for updates. Habitat on Ballard is looking great. We have an abundance of moist soil vegetation.
Boatwright 11/27/2019	2000 Ducks	99% Mallard, 1% Gadwall, Wood duck and Black Duck	Flooding made this week's survey impossible.

<p>Duck Island</p> <p><i>12/4/2019</i></p>	<p>2300 ducks</p>	<p>98% Mallards 2% Pintail, Ringneck, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Gadwall</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>Doug Travis WMA</p> <p><i>12/2/2019</i></p>	<p>3000 Ducks</p>	<p>95% Mallard, 5% mixed dabblers</p> <p>Much of the area south of Fish Lake Road could not be surveyed due to flooding.</p>	<p>On Tuesday, December 3, the river gage at Cairo, Illinois was 40.55 feet, predicted to rise to near 42 feet by December 5, then to remain at that level for several days before falling. At 38.5 feet, vehicular access to blind sites 16 and 17 was cut off by flooding. At 42 feet, water will likely be across the Fish Lake Road just west of the Fish Lake bridge. This will affect vehicular access to blind sites 5-9 and 11-14, including the Disabled Access blind, #13. At 42 feet, water will also be across the gravel road leading to the Indian Camp Slough boat ramp (blind sites 3, 4, and 10).</p>
<p>Sloughs WMA</p> <p><i>12/2/2019</i></p>	<p>10,250 ducks 45 CA geese 6,000 WF geese 2,000 snows 175 Tundra swans</p>	<p>92% Mallard, 5% Gadwall, 3% greenwing teal, widgeon, black ducks and pintail</p>	<p>Habitat on Sloughs is looking very good. We have an abundance of moist soil vegetation and water has risen considerably with the 3 inches of rain over the Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend.</p>

			During our survey period, birds were active over a large portion of the area using the newly added water and food.
Peabody WMA <i>12/4/2019</i>	199 ducks 135 Canada geese	80% Mallards, 20% gadwall and shovelers, & 15 divers.	All moist soil units are full of water. The Green and Pond rivers are full and providing some backwater situations.
Yellowbank WMA <i>12/5/2019</i>	450 Ducks	85% Mallard, 10% pintail, 5% other.	Excellent moist soil plant response and standing corn in most units. Most moist soil units are at maximum capacity, except for several of our larger units.
Barren River Lake WMA <i>12/3/2019</i>	50 ducks 80 CA geese 435 Sandhill Cranes	50/50 dabblers and divers Mallards, wood ducks, redheads and hooded mergansers noted.	Lake level is 545.1 (+17.1). Moist soil units are filling up slowly. 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) <i>12/3/2019</i>	9 bufflehead 8 CA geese		
Herrington Lake	<i>not surveyed</i>		
Cave Run Lake <i>12/5/2019</i>	112 Ducks 200 CA Geese 2 Swan 50 Coots	50 canvasback, 40 bufflehead, 20 ruddy ducks, 2 scaup	Lake is at 730.6', which is 6.6' from winter pool.