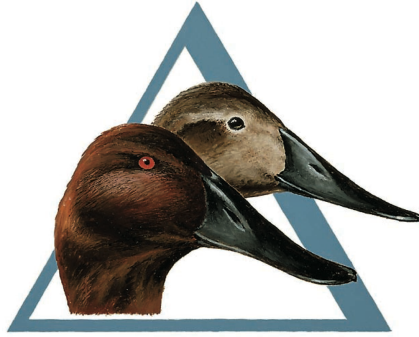


*Delta Waterfowl's
Status of Breeding Ducks
2010*



A Special Report from the Delta Waterfowl Foundation



DELTA WATERFOWL

Summary of Habitat Conditions Across the Breeding Grounds

As the breeding season arrives it is well known that wetland density and wetland habitat quality is what affects where ducks settle and the abundance of upland cover ultimately determines the relative success of ducks. In addition, the presence of ample water throughout the breeding season is critically important for a sustained breeding effort as well as to duckling survival.

This year wetland conditions across the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) were largely unchanged from the very wet conditions experienced in 2009. Good carryover water from last year and a wet fall in many areas of the prairies coupled with ample snowfall meant the 2010 breeding season got off to a good start.



Spring and summer rains maintained excellent wetland habitat throughout most areas of the PPR, which should translate into a strong breeding effort and increased duckling survival.

Conditions in the Dakotas were, frankly, exceptional. Remnants of last year's wetness coupled with above average fall precipitation and good snow cover translated into the highest pond count ever recorded in the eastern Dakotas.

In prairie Canada, conditions were more variable. Reports of extreme drought were recorded in late February and early March across many areas of Alberta and western Saskatchewan. Those early fears were reversed as spring rains and snows replenished wetland basins, restoring pond conditions to above average conditions. In all, pond counts in prairie Canada were 5% higher than last year and 9% above the long-term average.

SUMMARY OF POND COUNTS FROM THE PPR

<i>Region</i>	<i>2010 Pond Count</i>	<i>Change from 2009</i>	<i>Change from Long-term average</i>
S. Alberta	678,000	-1%	-8%
S. Saskatchewan	2,668,000	21%	34%
SW. Manitoba	382,000	-43%	-43%
Eastern Dakotas	2,341,000	28%	129%
Montana and W. Dakotas	595,000	-42%	8%
<i>TOTALS</i>	<i>6,665,000</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>34%</i>

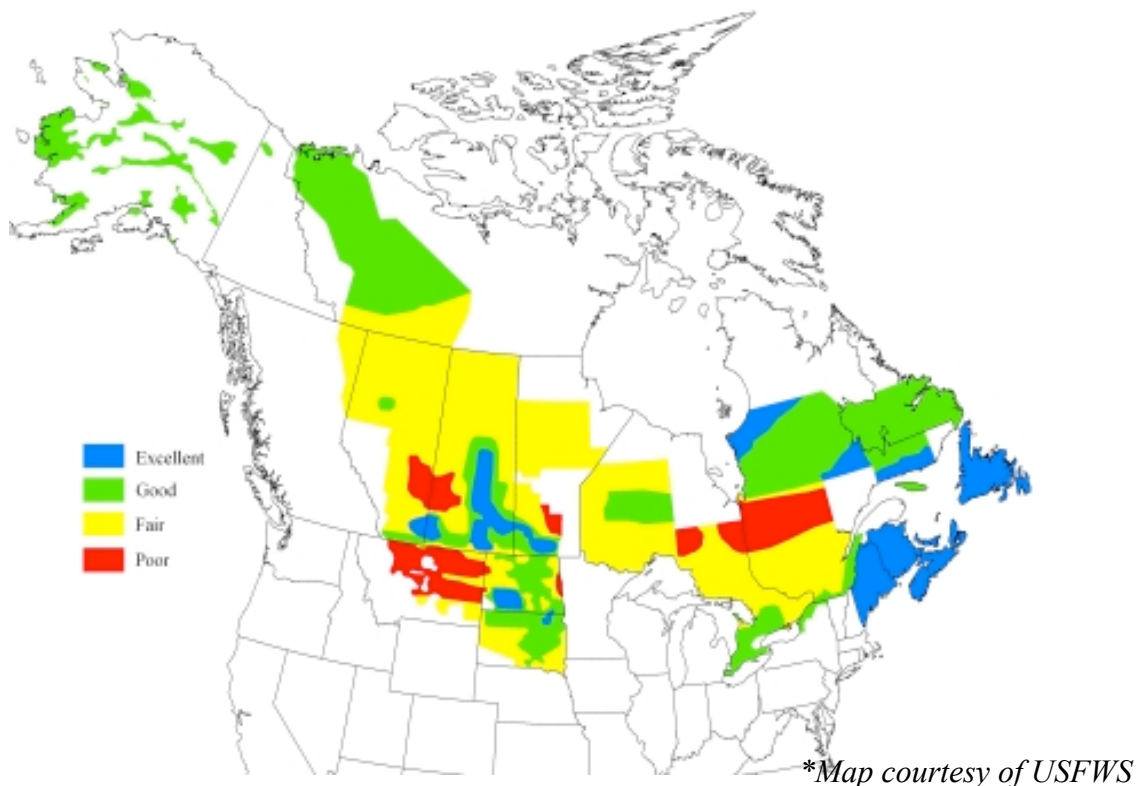
While wetland conditions were favorable when surveys were completed in May, wetland conditions across large portions of the prairies were further improved as significant rains fell from mid May through the end of June. Temporary and seasonal wetlands were common throughout many areas of the PPR through early July, a rarity for this time of year. The long run of good water conditions in the prairies should translate into a long and vigorous breeding effort and high duckling survival. This has been confirmed by our research crews in both North Dakota and Manitoba where re-nesting efforts have been sustained long into the summer, with crews still finding early-stage nests in July.

To the north, boreal-forest and tundra-breeding habitats experienced a much earlier arrival of spring than in 2009. Last year, cold temperatures and a late break-up meant ducks and geese in more northerly latitudes were facing bleak prospects for

production. Based on a variety of reports, ducks and geese in the north should benefit significantly from a milder spring.

Farther east, conditions across the eastern breeding grounds were poorer than 2009. Wetland conditions in key portions of southern Ontario and southern Quebec were classified as fair with better conditions observed in the northeastern U.S. and Canada's Maritime Provinces.

The map below characterizes habitat conditions throughout the surveyed range. This represents a non-analytical measure of relative habitat conditions as described by pilot biologists and ground crews conducting the surveys.













Duck Numbers in the Traditional Survey Area

Total duck numbers in the prairies, boreal forest and arctic habitats were largely unchanged from 2009 (down 3%) with 40,893,000 birds in 2010. Duck numbers were up significantly in the Alaska/Yukon survey area and the boreal forest areas of Alberta,

British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. Duck numbers were down significantly in the northern reaches of Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario as well as all areas of prairie Canada. Duck numbers in the eastern Dakotas, western Dakotas and Montana survey areas were up slightly.

Most duck species were very near last year's population estimates with only pintails (up 9%), blue-wing teal (down 14%) and canvasback (down 12%) with substantial changes in population size. The majority of species were also well above their long term averages with the notable exception of wigeon, 2009 and 12% above the long-term average.

2010 Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey

Species	2010	2009	% Change from '09	% Change from LTA
 Mallard	8.430	8.512	-1	+12
 Gadwall	2.977	3.054	-3	+67
 American Wigeon	2.425	2.469	-2	-7
 Green-winged Teal	3.476	3.444	+1	+78
 Blue-winged Teal	6.329	7.384	-14	+36
 Northern Shoveler	4.057	4.376	-7	+76
 Northern Pintail	3.509	3.225	+9	-13
 Redhead	1.064	1.044	+2	+63
 Canvasback	.585	.662	-12	+3
 Scaup	4.244	4.172	+2	-16
Total Ducks	40.893		-3	+21

All numbers in millions. LTA is long-term average.

While there is little noteworthy in terms of duck abundance, there is certainly news in terms of duck distribution. For only the second time (2009 being the first) the U.S. portions of the Prairie Pothole Region attracted more total ducks than the Canadian PPR (13.9 million in the U.S prairies vs. 10.6 million in the Canadian prairies). Also, mallards and pintail were more numerous in the U.S than in Canada (pintails nearly three times more numerous).

This is a testament to the extraordinary wetland conditions in the Dakotas as well as more than 15 years of strong production as a result of an intact wetland habitat base, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) nesting cover and abundant native grasslands in

the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region. Canada, in contrast, has seen the ongoing loss of wetlands, scarce nesting cover and resultant low productivity.

Duck Numbers in the Eastern Breeding Grounds

Duck numbers in the eastern breeding grounds reflected the variability of habitat conditions in the region. Mallard populations were down 17% and slightly below the long-term average, while Green-wing teal were down 6% from last year’s estimate, and above the long-term average. Ringnecks were up slightly and black ducks were down modestly from last year.

Population Estimates from the Eastern Breeding Grounds

<i>Species</i>	<i>2010 Population</i>	<i>Change from Last Year</i>	<i>Change from Long-term avg.</i>
Mallard	403,000	-17%	-5%
Black Duck	444,000	-5%	-7%
Wigeon	7,000	-39%	-61%
Green wing teal	256,000	-6%	6%
Scaup	51,000	-5%	17%
Ringneck	567,000	5%	10%
Goldeneye	395,000	-1%	-5%
Bufflehead	25,000	-6%	2%
Scoters	75,000	-26%	-10%
Merganser	386,000	-15%	-14%

State Breeding Duck Surveys

In addition to the surveys completed by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service over the large breeding areas, Minnesota, Wisconsin and California also conduct state-level breeding duck surveys which are utilized in assessing population trends and establishing regulations.

Minnesota's total duck breeding population was down slightly, and 15% below the long-term average with mallards being slightly higher than last year's estimates. In Wisconsin, total ducks were down 23% from 2009 and 12% below the long-term average, while mallard numbers were unchanged. To the Pacific Flyway, California's total ducks saw a modest increase of 6% to 541,300 ducks and mallards were up 22% to 367,892, which is in line with the long-term average.

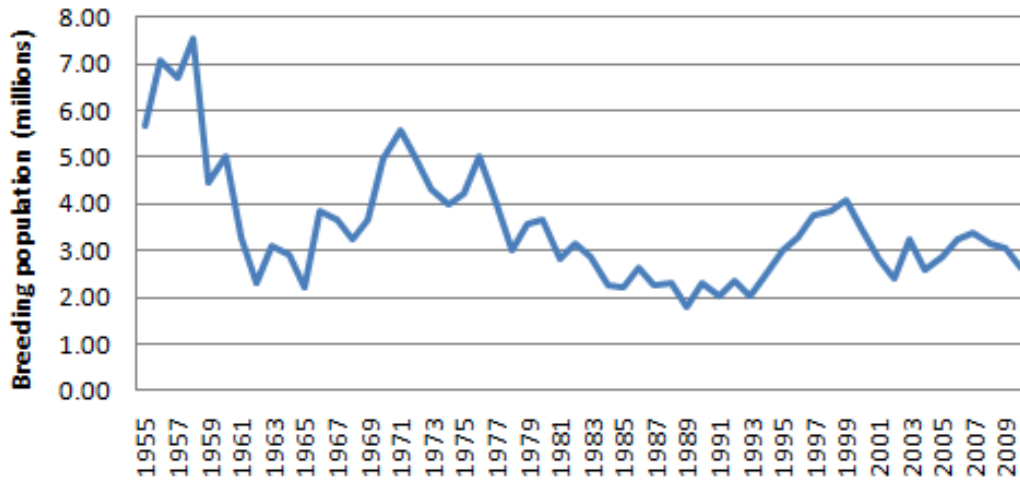
In Summary

Above-average to excellent wetland conditions across the majority of the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) should translate into good duck production. In addition, as noted above, ample moisture in May and June in many areas should help drive production and increase duckling survival.

However, similar conditions existed last year, and for many, the fall flight did not live up to expectations. One plausible explanation for this is the extensive loss of upland nesting cover (both CRP and native grasslands) in the U.S. PPR. Since the banner years of the late 1990's, roughly two million acres of nesting cover has been lost in the Dakotas alone—the equivalent of 3,100 square miles. This staggering loss of secure nesting cover, while difficult to measure, surely has compromised the region's duck-production potential.

In addition, prairie Canada continues to face the challenges of overwhelming habitat loss and declining productivity. The consistent ongoing loss of wetlands and shockingly low productivity rates continue to erode the duck production from the Great Duck Factory.

Mallard Breeding Population Estimates - Canadian Traditional Survey Area (1955 - 2010)



The decline of mallards in the Canadian Prairies is a tell tale indicator of the habitat and duck production problems in the “Duck Factory.”

In sum, this habitat loss means we have a huge job ahead of us to secure the large fall flights we desire. We need to maintain a viable CRP program, find a way to sustain native grass and keep an ample wetland base in the Dakotas because that landscape has generated a significant share of the fall flight since 1994.

In addition, the case is clear that Canada needs new, innovative approaches to address chronic habitat loss and poor duck production. Delta’s work on Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) to create a made-in-Canada, CRP-type program is certainly leading the pack in that regard.

Furthermore, it is Delta’s work through predator management, Hen Houses and Adopt A Pothole that can continue to achieve gains in ducks produced and acres conserved. In addition, Delta’s research continues to be on the cutting edge of topics facing waterfowl and their habitat, a key element in today’s rapidly changing world. It will take this broad suite of efforts to provide the abundant ducks all of us waterfowlers desire.



While the challenges facing ducks are significant, Delta has the programming and vision to secure large fall flights for the future!