

October 28th, 2016 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

The weather was right for a waterfowl survey of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers on Monday, October 24th, following the Central Zone duck season opener in Illinois. Duck numbers (171,990) were up 71% along the Illinois River from the previous week; however, I think the majority of this increase was attributed to the shuffle of ducks out of the private clubs and into the refuges due to hunting pressure. There were some new immigrants into the Illinois River valley as noted by the increase in ring-necked ducks; nevertheless, we were still 12% below the 10-yr average for the last week of October. On the central Mississippi River, I estimated 151,435 total ducks which was 10% above the 10-yr average, but only 7% up from the previous week. The Mississippi likely didn't see the big increase in duck numbers with the Central Zone opener because duck hunting in Missouri doesn't open until October 29th in the North Zone and November 5th in the Middle Zone; therefore, the ducks were still scattered in the private clubs along the lower Mississippi River above St. Louis, MO. Those white-fronted geese that showed up last week, must have continued their way south, because we only saw a handful of specks this week.

I hate to be a “Debbie Downer” but hunting reports from the field were poor for the Central Zone opener with a preponderance of dismal from the Illinois River. Some hunters in the vicinity of Bath reported their worst opener in 20 years, and many of the big duck clubs along the Illinois River reported fewer than 1 duck per hunter. Opening day hunting success at Anderson Lake and Rice Lake was 1.2 ducks/hunter which was down from the 2.2 ducks/hunter on opening day in 2015. This year's harvest was primarily wood ducks and teal. Hunter success (1.6 ducks/hunter) at the Mississippi River Area (MRA) near the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers was a little better than the middle Illinois River; and again, American green-winged teal and wood ducks dominated the harvest. Only 44 mallards were harvested in the entire MRA on opening day. I don't think it will get much better until this weather pattern breaks and we get a push of birds from the prairies. Until then, be safe and enjoy the mild weather.

Since we're not having any luck duck hunting, we might as well dream of the big flocks of mallards that should be arriving in November. For more information about the waterfowl survey, check out our webpage at www.bellrose.org. Stay tuned for more updates next week.....

