

November 17th, 2016 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

We completed the latest waterfowl survey on Monday, November 14th. The field reports of new migrants arriving on November 8-9th were verified in this week's numbers. We estimated 333,095 ducks in the Illinois River valley which was 15% above average and up 56% from the previous week. A big chunk of that increase was due to an influx of mallards in both the upper and lower Illinois River where mallards increased 196% from the previous week. Likewise, total ducks (368,455) along the central Mississippi River valley (CMRV) were up 44% from the previous week and 12% above average for the middle of November. Mallard numbers along the CMRV climbed 83% from the previous week, and a decent sized raft of lesser scaup (12,000) was found between Nauvoo and Fort Madison. With the weather pattern forming in the prairies, I expect the arrival of new ducks beginning on November 18th. However, the central Illinois forecast of northwest winds and low temperatures in the mid-20's on Saturday will likely drive out many of those non-mallard dabblers that have been hanging around for several weeks now. I guess next week's survey will verify that prediction.

This week I decided to write about our canine companions. Those retrievers that make our lives easier and more enjoyable come in many breeds including the Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Curly Coated Retriever, Flat Coated Retriever, Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever, and even the Standard Poodle, and Weimaraner can make good duck dogs. Don't discount the mixed breeds either as I have a friend that used a Rottweiler-Boxer mix, and he was a fine dog. We all know that a good dog will find countless more birds in dense vegetation than his owner; however, my quick search of the literature didn't reveal much information on the percentage of downed ducks that our dogs find for us. One study from northern Illinois suggested pheasant hunters without dogs lost about 22% of their downed birds, while hunters using dogs lost only 9% of their shot birds. Some studies indicated crippling losses in ducks was between 33-50%; however, an experienced hunter with a well-trained retriever reduced that number to <16%. My preference is the Labrador Retriever, specifically the yellow lab. I remember an old duck hunter from Springfield, IL, that liked to tell me I had an imitation "black dog" referring to the black labs. He was a Chesapeake fancier and gave high praise to his beloved Chessie. No matter what breed you prefer, a good dog is a pleasure to watch and hunt with. Here's a toast to our dogs!

For more information about the waterfowl survey, check out our webpage at www.bellrose.org. Stay tuned for more updates next week.....

