

Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report, Oct. 28, 2021

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the 6th report for 2021. Reports will be compiled weekly throughout the hunting season and should be available by Thursday afternoon each week. The Conservation Officer Report, available on the DNR web site, also contains information about waterfowl hunter success across the state.

General: 28 October 2021

Duck hunting was generally slow over the past week but some hunters are still having success by scouting and finding some non-traditional locations that are holding birds. A number of reports this week noted that ducks were decoy-shy, call-shy, and shore-shy which likely means they have been present for a while.

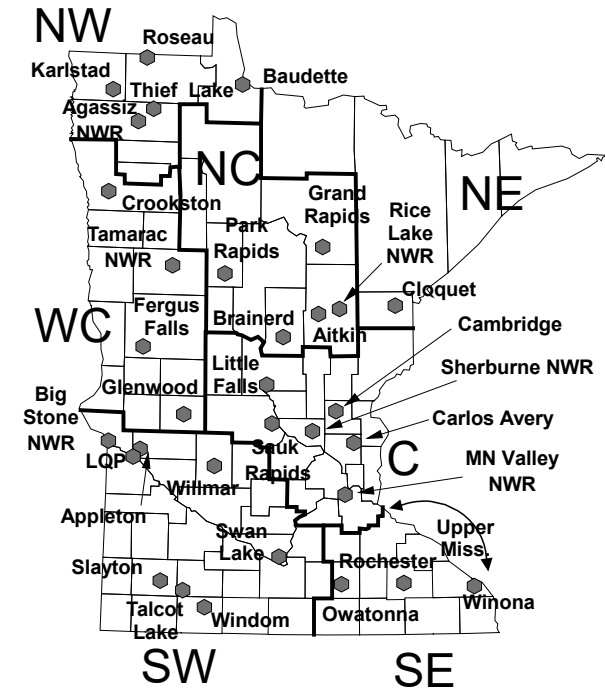
Only a few blue-winged teal and wood ducks remain in the state. Many of the traditional mid-season migrants are still present, including pintail, gadwall, wigeon, green-winged teal, ring-necked ducks and redheads. A few late season migrants were observed this week, including scaup, bufflehead, and goldeneyes. Canada goose numbers remain fairly good in many areas and fair numbers of white-fronted geese are still present in the state.

Wetland conditions remain fairly dry, but improved with recent rains and there is some sheetwater present in fields in a few locations. Hunter access remains a challenge in many locations and hunters should scout access areas prior to hunting.

Crop harvest continues to progress at a rapid pace with corn harvest >75% complete and soybean harvest complete, both ~2 weeks ahead of average.

At this point in the season, hunter numbers, based on state waterfowl stamp sales, are 6% lower than last year and similar to numbers in 2019. Most reports indicated very low hunting pressure over the past week.

Weather conditions have remained very mild. The first ½ of duck season was the warmest in at least 50 years, with daily high temperatures averaging >10° above the long-term average. Winds were often very calm and/or from the south or east, which is



not ideal for waterfowl migration.

Temperatures are expected to remain above average through Saturday with highs in the 50s statewide. A cold front will move into the state Saturday night/Sunday and high temperatures are expected to be in the mid and upper 30s through next week with lows in the upper teens and low 20s in northern MN. In southern MN, highs will be in the upper 30s and low 40s next week with lows in the low to mid-20s. Winds will shift to the WNW statewide for most of next week as well. Many wetlands and shallow lakes should be ice-covered by early next week, especially in northern MN.

The outlook is excellent over the next week with the changing weather conditions.

Waterfowl season reminders		
	Duck season dates	Goose season dates
North Zone	Sept. 25-Nov. 23	Sept. 25-Dec. 24
Central Zone	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Nov. 28	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Dec. 29
South Zone	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Nov. 28	Sept. 25-Oct. 3 and Oct. 9-Dec. 29

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood duck, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 2 black duck, 1 pintail. 1 scaup (bluebill) may be taken per day through Oct. 14 and 2/day the remainder of the season. Mergansers: 5 per day, no more than 2 may be hooded mergansers. Bag limits for geese are 5 dark geese/day.

Possession limits: 3 times the daily bag limit for all migratory birds.

Shooting hours begin ½ hour before sunrise until sunset the entire season. Motorized decoys are legal statewide for the entire season. Hunting geese overwater is legal statewide the entire season. The sandhill crane season is open Sept. 18 through Oct. 24 in the Northwest zone only. Bag limits are 2/day and a sandhill crane permit is required.

Open water hunting: On Lake Pepin, Lake of the Woods, Lake Mille Lacs, and Lake Superior, open water hunting is allowed as long as boats remain anchored. On the Mississippi River south of Hastings, hunting is allowed not more than 100 feet from any shoreline, including islands. Hunters should consult the 2021 Waterfowl Hunting regulations (available from license vendors or online at the [Minnesota Hunting and Trapping Regulations page](#) for additional details and regulations.

Safety Never Takes A Holiday: treat every gun as if it were loaded, be 100% certain of your target before pulling the trigger, wear your life vest, pay attention to other hunters and your hunting partners, and watch the weather

The following is a summary of waterfowl habitat and hunting conditions from various reporting stations across the state.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Northwest			
Roseau River and Roseau Lake WMA	<p>Low water levels persist resulting in good habitat conditions on the pools. The Roseau River seen a little rise but remains low with only shallow water habitat in the channel. Harvest is complete and very little remains that hasn't been fall tilled.</p>	<p>Canada goose numbers are low. Duck numbers are low as well with some exception in hard-to-reach areas of wild rice. No new migrants have arrived. Mallards, Green-winged Teal, and Ring-necked Ducks are the most common species on the area.</p> <p>Ice will not be an issue this weekend but will start to form quickly early next week. The forecast is for northwest winds and moderate temperatures over the weekend with lows just below freezing. Highs next week will be in the 30s.</p>	<p>Hunter activity was very light over the 7 days. Few geese were taken and hunters harvested 2 ducks/hunter with a bag dominated by Green-winged Teal and Mallards.</p> <p>Access is challenging area-wide for hunters due to low water levels and dense wild rice and submergent vegetation although the rice is thinning quickly. Outboard motors can manage on Pool 1 West but are not recommended elsewhere on Roseau River WMA pools at this time.</p> <p>Pool 3 is 7" low with a navigable borrow ditch. Pool 2 is 30" low with dense aquatic plant growth in the borrow ditches; some mudflats have appeared. Pool 1 West is 6" below full pool and fully navigable by outboard. The Roseau River has risen 6" and has just reached a navigable depth.</p> <p>For more information on access, see Roseau River WMA's webpage</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Thief Lake WMA	We are currently 15" below our fall target level. Access is improving but continues to be moderately challenging at the boat launches and canoes/kayaks are a good option.	High temperatures will remain around 50 with lows approaching freezing through the weekend. Winds will primarily be out of the SW with some WNW pushes.	Hunting pressure has dropped since MEA weekend and the success has been down the last two weeks. Hunters are now averaging around 1.25 ducks per hunter and the top birds in the bag are ringers and pintail.
West central			
Detroit Lakes	<p>Wetlands remain low, recent rains may make field hunting difficult but no ponding is occurring. Rice stands are starting to deteriorate.</p> <p>Crop harvest is largely complete and tillage is close behind, a few corn fields still left but not many. Fields are really being turned black quickly.</p>	<p>Forecast for the weekend is calling for cooler temps, lows in the 20s and a high of 40 by Sunday. North/NW winds Sunday into next week. I expect shallow waters to start to freeze over Sunday into next week.</p> <p>Migration has been very slow the last week. Mild temperatures and south winds aren't helping. Goose numbers are good, but ducks numbers have been poor the last week. Some buffies have moved in, but overall duck numbers are poor with few new ducks. Coot numbers still not at peak on area lakes.</p>	<p>Success the 5th weekend was poor for ducks. Ducks have been around awhile with few new birds. Mallards, green-winged teal, wigeon, gadwall, and ringnecks most common species in hunter's bags.</p> <p>Goose numbers are good, but few hunters out chasing them.</p>
Fergus Falls and Lake Christina	<p>More rain this week has helped keep wetland basins at least where they are, and Lake Christina continues to rise slightly.</p> <p>Another week and crop harvest may be complete.</p>	<p>We've had some strong winds this week, but still waiting on those strong northwest winds. No real changes from last week, aside from maybe more geese in the area. We should see colder temperatures toward the beginning of next week and may see the season's first ice on smaller wetlands.</p> <p>Reports of new coots have come in on Lake Christina, suggesting that some new ducks are in the mix.</p>	It sounds like hunters are struggling to find birds in the usual areas – this season might turn into more of a waiting game.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Central			
Carlos Avery WMA	Water levels are coming up but still a little below average which is great for the wild rice. The wild rice crop is good to excellent in all of the pools this year. The rice in Sunrise Pools is a little less dense which should allow decent access. There is still plenty of rice to attract and hold ducks.	Some birds moved into the area last week and some have stuck around at least through 10/27. Most teal and wood ducks have moved out but mallards, pintail, gadwall, wigeon, and geese remain. No real numbers of divers noted. Wet, windy, and cloudy weather over the next few days might help birds move around a little more during daylight hours. Scouting is key!!	Success have been above average for most of the season at Carlos Avery WMA. Wood ducks and blue-winged teal were a good portion of the bag earlier with green-winged teal making up most of the bag as of late with some mallards and pintail noted as well.
Sherburne NWR	No change in water levels on the St. Francis River or Long Pool.	Mallard numbers continue to increase across the refuge with a good variety of puddlers mixed in. Green-winged teal numbers remain high and a decent number of ring necks are present in large flocks. Wood ducks have declined significantly. Weekend Forecast: Highs in the mid-50s on Friday and Saturday. Expect fog on Saturday morning. NW winds overnight Saturday into Sunday will drop the temp to below freezing and a daytime high of 46.	Waterfowl seized from hunters in a closed area included gadwall, mallards, and green-winged teal. A reminder to hunters to be sure that they are in areas of the refuge open to waterfowl hunting.
Southwest			
Redwood Falls	Crop harvest is almost finished with essentially all soybeans harvested and 95% of the corn harvested depending on the location and what remains is disappearing rapidly. Tillage is 50-60% complete. Recent rains have wetlands as full as they have been all fall, but they are still below normal levels and some have mudflat rings separating the water from the shore.	Cooler weather has returned, but no ducks have come with it. Local Canada geese are still around and hanging out on sewage ponds, city parks, and other refuge areas. Wood ducks have dwindled and blue winged teal are gone.	Lately waterfowl hunting has been more trick than treat in the area. Very few birds around, and almost no hunting activity taking place.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Marshall	An additional 1.2" of rain fell on Wed. that has temporarily stopped crop harvest on the last corn fields remaining. Field hunting opportunities exist but there will be muddy areas to contend with.	Some white-front flocks are still passing through the area and larger groups of swans were observed this week along with a few divers, but no major migration has occurred yet. There are still teal, wood ducks and mallards in the area along with a smattering of other species as well as Canada geese. Weekend forecast is for clear sunny skies and high near 60 on Sat, but dropping to 31 on Sat nite and a high of 45 on Sun. Winds will start out light from the SW but switch to NW at 10-15 mph by early afternoon Sat for the remainder of the weekend.	Duck hunting pressure is still low as hunters await an influx of new birds.
Appleton	While most crops are out, traditional field hunting is difficult due to recent heavy rains. That said, there are now good opportunities to hunt flooded fields in some areas.	Wood ducks and BW Teal now pretty much gone. Mallards, pintail, gadwall and GW teal most common, but divers starting to show up as well. Reports of white-fronts staging in a few areas. Forecast is calling for below freezing nights ahead, which might help move more birds.	Pressure has really dropped off. Success has been very spotty and when ducks are found they haven't been in huge numbers – more scattered throughout area with the flooded field conditions right now.
Lac qui Parle WMA	Water levels on Marsh Lake and Lac qui Parle Lake are still at or above normal pool. The area received another 1-1.5 inches of rain Wednesday. Some flooded ag fields ad sheet water in harvested fields is likely. Corn and soybean harvest is almost 100% complete. Tillage is a little behind, but many fields will be done in the next week or two.	<p>The goose count on the refuge remains low and below the average for this time of year. Goose count is currently 500. The one bright spot is Marsh Lake. The lake is still holding good number of ducks. Many early migrating species like blue-winged teal and wood ducks have moved south, but the lake is holding good numbers of green-winged teal, mallards, gadwalls, and pintails.</p> <p>Saturday-Sunny, with a high near 57. South southeast wind 5 to 15 mph becoming northwest in the afternoon.</p> <p>Sunday-Mostly sunny, with a high near 45. Northwest wind 10 to 15 mph.</p>	<p>Some reports of limits of ducks taken on Marsh Lake with some reports of stale birds that are decoy/call shy. Scouting and finding birds actively feeding has proven the best success.</p> <p>Waterfowl hunters please note that boat traffic on Marsh Lake is possible. Hunters should be ready for more than 3,000 acres of new emergent vegetation. Scouting ahead of time will be important. Remember the eastern half of the lake is feeding and resting area. No motors allowed.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Willmar	<p>We received some recent rain on 10/27 and 10/28. This will not be enough to significantly flood fields or raise water levels significantly. There could be a few areas of sheet water in harvested cropland fields. Lakes and wetlands remain low. Corn harvest is around 85% complete. Soybean harvest is well over 90% complete. Field hunting opportunities abound at this time, but tillage is also rapidly being completed. Depending on the extent of tillage, some of those fields may still attract birds.</p>	<p>Divers arrived in the area right on schedule. The first reports of bag limits on divers started around 10/17 and birds continue to filter in. A few random flocks of snow geese were also in the area this week. Weather has been changing and it appears that a cold front coming this weekend will usher in much cooler temps for the first week of November. I would expect new birds to arrive in the area through the Halloween weekend.</p>	<p>Mixed bags of ducks have been common in the last 10 days. There are pintail, wigeon, gadwall, mallards, and the usual divers in the area. The weather will shift to include gusty N and NW winds over the next 3-4 days and I would expect some ducks to ride the winds ahead, and during the passage of the cold front. Now is the time to get out there as the season is waning.</p>
Southeast			

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Owatonna	<p>Habitat conditions are variable across the area. Scouting is recommended as many ponds are dry or below normal. Periodic rains helped to stabilize water levels for a time, but many shallow basins have been receding again. Rice Lake (Steele and Dodge Counties), State Line Lake (Freeborn County) and Lower Elysian Lake (Waseca County) were drawn down for habitat purposes and remain very low. Row crop harvest is nearly complete, especially in the southern half of the area. Only about 10% of the corn remains standing. Where the combines pass fall tillage often follows.</p>	<p>The area experienced a hard freeze on the 22nd – 23rd bringing an end to the last of the summer squash and creating a bit of skim ice on small, shallow waters. Temperatures moderated some after the weekend with warmer overnight temperatures and seasonal highs. Strong southerly winds developed for the 26th and 27th. Most of the area remained dry until widespread rains moved in late Wednesday continuing through Thursday. Last weekend's cold front brought modest numbers of mid-season migrants including coots, Canada geese, buffleheads, canvasbacks, redheads and a variety of puddle ducks.</p>	<p>Hunter activity was up some over "MEA" weekend and light during the mid-week period. Bag reports have been variable, but hunters were finding success with new migrants. At Rice Lake green-winged teal continued to dominate the bag comprising 55% of the birds reported. They were followed by Canada geese (13%) and canvasbacks (10%) with a variety of other ducks rounding out the take, including a few late migrant blue-winged teal and wood ducks.</p>

Waterfowl Count Data, week of October 25, 2021

Area	Date	Swans this week	Canada geese			Ducks				Coot this week	Comments
			Number seen ^a :			Number seen:					
			This week	Last count	Last Year	This week	Last count	Last year	This weeks duck species - % composition ^b		
Thief Lake WMA			NS	1,100	NS	NS	6,100	90% Frozen			
Sherburne NWR	10/26	60	2,900	4,300	NS	18,000	22,000	NS	42% MAL, 25% RN, 22% GWT, 4% WD, 2% WIG, 2% GAD, 1% PIN, 1% HOOD		
Carlos Avery WMA	10/26	30	100	50	Frozen	3,300	400	Frozen	46% MAL, 46% PIN, 3% GAD, 3% GWT, 2% WIG		
Lac qui Parle WMA	10/28		500	450	2,000						

^a- Numbers seen during the current survey, last survey: the previous count from this year, last year: the number recorded during the same or nearby week last year.

^b- abbreviations: MAL = mallard, GAD = Gadwall, WIG = Am. wigeon, GWT = Am. green-winged teal, BWT = blue-winged teal, SHOV = Northern shoveler, PIN = Northern pintail, WD = Wood duck, RED = Redhead, CAN = Canvasback, SCP = Scaup, RN = Ring-necked duck, HOOD = Hooded merganser, NS = No survey.