

# Minnesota Waterfowl Migration and Hunting Report – 19 September 2013

The following report is a compilation of state and federal wildlife manager reports and waterfowl surveys from across Minnesota. This is the first report for 2013. 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:** 19 September 2013, 3:00 p.m.

Duck hunters will encounter dry conditions across much of the state on opening weekend but conditions should be improved slightly from last season.

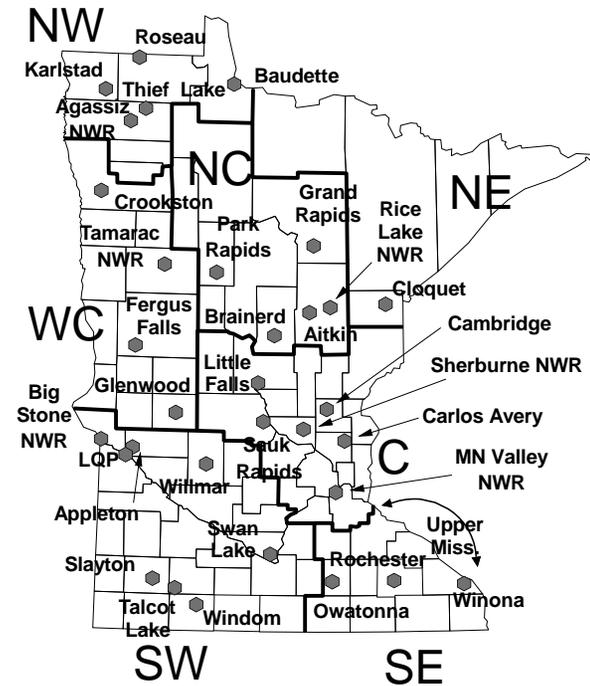
Wild rice crops were good in most areas of the state this year and improved dramatically from last year in east central MN.

The number of breeding ducks and mallards in Minnesota this spring was above average; continental breeding duck numbers were high this spring and most species of ducks were well above their long-term averages. Waterfowl production (number of young hatched) was expected to be fair to good in most locations so a good fall flight of ducks is expected.

Most managers are expecting a fair to good opening weekend. Blue-winged teal, wood ducks, and mallards will dominate hunters' bags throughout the state on opening day and early in the season. In north central Minnesota, ring-necked duck numbers should be fairly low during opening weekend but will improve in the next 1-2 weeks as migrants move into the state later this month.

Hunting success for Canada geese has been fair to poor across the state in August and September. Breeding Canada goose numbers were lower this spring and production of young geese was poor due to the extremely late spring across the state. Some molt migrant Canada geese have returned to the state in the past week which should improve hunting success this weekend. The outlook for Canada goose hunting the rest of the season is good as large numbers of geese should move into the state later in the fall.

A weak cold front is expected on Friday with cool temperatures and strong northwest winds across much of the state. Hunters can expect seasonal temperatures across the state on opening weekend, with highs in the 60s and lows in the lower 40s. No



precipitation is expected on Saturday or Sunday. Temperatures are expected to remain in the 60s and 70s into next week with a stable high pressure system and little precipitation expected.

**Reminders:**

<u>Duck season dates:</u>	<u>Goose season dates</u>
North Zone: Sept. 21-Nov. 19	Sept. 21-Dec. 16
Central Zone: Sept. 21-Sept. 29 and Oct. 5-Nov. 24	Sept. 21-Sept. 29 and Oct. 5-Dec. 21
South Zone: Sept. 21-Sept. 29 and Oct. 12-Dec. 1	Sept. 21-Sept. 29 and Oct. 12-Dec. 28

Bag limits are 6 ducks/day, with no more than: 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 scaup, 3 wood duck, 2 pintail, 2 redhead, 2 canvasback, 1 black duck. Merganser: 5 per day, no more than 2 may be hooded mergansers. Canada goose bag limits are 3/day.

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

Shooting hours begin ½ hour before sunrise until 4 p.m. through Friday, Oct. 4 and until sunset the remainder of the season. Motorized decoys are prohibited statewide through Saturday October 5<sup>th</sup> and on state wildlife management areas the entire season.

The sandhill crane season is open until Oct. 20 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 will be 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 2013 Waterfowl Hunting regulations (available from license vendors or online at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/hunting/index.html>) 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 pre-season waterfowl habitat and hunting conditions from various reporting stations across the state.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
<b>Northwest</b>			
Thief Lake WMA	Thief Lake is currently 2-3" below target, but well above the level observed last year. Access is good at all boat launches. Cover is in good shape, but last year's low water levels allowed bulrush and cattail stands to expand in some areas, changing marsh geometry. Food is generally available for both marsh and field feeding birds. Small grains are less prevalent on the landscape with the increase in corn and soybeans.	First migrating Canada geese observed on 9/3, with additional arrivals since that date.  Local production of geese was poor, and duck production was late and mixed.	13 parties participated in Youth Waterfowl Day, averaging about a bird per hunter. Bag was comprised almost entirely of dabblers of a variety of species.  Early goose hunters had a quiet opening weekend, but success has increased with the arrival of migrant birds.
Thief River Falls	Below average water levels; in particular, please note that Farmes Pool on Elm Lake WMA is in temporary drawdown while we do cattail control	Have been observing small flocks of geese along with a few larger flocks. Some ducks on larger wetlands with water, many of the smaller ones not holding ducks or only a few.  Wheat harvest completed and some fields have been plowed (some still with stubble).  Weekend forecast is sunny and mild temps (60s and 70s), lows at night 40s and 50s. Saturday calm, Sunday a little breezy. Cooler temps and possibility of rain on Monday.	

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Roseau River WMA	<p>While the area is wetter than last year, the local area missed many of the deluges that nearby areas received. The Roseau River is low, and both plant growth and shallow water will pose challenges for boat access. The oxbows of the river are not navigable at the present time via watercraft.</p> <p>--The pools at Roseau River are lower than normal. This has made for an abundance of submerged aquatic food on all pools as well as for a healthy wild rice crop on Pool 2. Pools 1W and 2 are much lower than normal. Pool 2 has been drawn down to facilitate dike repairs. Navigation in this pool may be difficult. Pool 3 is nearly full.</p> <p>--Roseau Lake is largely dry. Some pockets of water exist, and cranes, geese, and mallards have been observed using these shallow waters.</p> <p>--Planting of crops was late this year, thus harvest is late, resulting in an abundance of wheat stubble fields on the landscape at present.</p>	<p>--A significant influx of Canada geese was observed during 2 &amp; 3 September. Another pulse of birds arrived on 9 September. Fidelity to WMA sanctuaries for roosting is good with most geese going out to stubble fields to feed 2X/day.</p> <p>--Ducks are scattered, and their numbers are more difficult to assess. Wood duck, wigeon, and blue-winged/green-winged teal numbers appear to be strong. Mallards are limited in number. Diver numbers on the pools are building. Overall, duck numbers are encouraging.</p> <p>--Forecasted high for 9/20/2013 is in the low 50s with blustery NW winds.</p>	<p>September Canada goose hunting success has been good for both field hunters and pass shooters thus far, though participation has been limited. Crane hunting success on opening weekend was good in the Roseau Lake area.</p>
<b>North central</b>			
Grand Rapids	<p>The wild rice crop overall is good and is excellent on some wetlands. Water levels are adequate for hunters in most wetlands.</p>	<p>There was patchy frost on 9-16 and 17. There are some mallards and wood ducks in the area, but few ring necks and teal.</p>	<p>Early Goose hunting activity was about normal with lower success due to poor production this summer.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Park Rapids	Lake, stream, and wetland water levels are slightly below normal but all remain navigable. Most emergent vegetation is in good shape. Rice stands were variable across the work area. Some stands were very robust with excellent rice while others were short and produced little seed.	Temperatures have been slightly above average this past week. A cold front is expected by the weekend which should bring more seasonable temperatures. Woodducks appear to be the most abundant species in the area. These birds are using rice beds in secluded locations. Mallards, ringnecks, and teal are present but in lower numbers. A teal migration was noted in early September. Many birds moved into and out of the area during that time. Canada goose numbers have increased recently with some molt migrants and failed breeders moving back into the area.	Youth waterfowl hunters harvested a mix of Teal, Mallard, and Woodducks during the youth waterfowl day.  Early in September goose hunting was poor with few birds present. Success has improved this past week with new birds arriving.
<b>Northeast</b>			
Cloquet	Water levels in the Cloquet area are normal for this time of year. The notable exceptions to this are the managed pools at Canosia WMA. These pools were drawn down earlier in the summer for dam repairs and they are still very low. Angell Pool is about 1.5 ft. low and Trettle Pool is 3-4 ft. low. Waterfowl are using the pools, but hunter access will be more difficult than usual. The wild rice crop is generally good to very good in the Cloquet area.	Teal and wood ducks should be available in good numbers for the opener this weekend. We have had some mild fall-like weather, but no frost or strong cold fronts yet. There was a notable goose migration last weekend. A few flocks of snow geese were mixed in.	Goose hunters have been finding birds. The hunters putting in the scouting effort to find active fields have been having the most success.
<b>West central</b>			
Fergus Falls	Wetland conditions good, recent rains have improved water levels. Small grain harvest complete.	Some Canada geese have recently moved into area, likely returning molt migrants. Fair number of mallards, wood ducks and teal around although birds are concentrated	Canada goose hunting appears to be pretty slow up to this point.

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Tamarac NWR	Wild rice crops were below average refuge wide this year due to the heavy rainfall in late June. This was followed by a dry spell with little precipitation. Water levels are low with some ponds being almost dry.	The actual waterfowl count is not indicative of the actual waterfowl presence on the refuge. The presence of wild rice on some lakes even though it was density reduced and had poor productivity, made visibility and detection of waterfowl difficult.	There was higher than normal hunting pressure for the youth waterfowl hunting opener. There were many opportunities of a successful harvest with a mixed bag limit of mallards, wood ducks, and teal. There were an estimated number of 12-18 youth hunters observed on the refuge. The harvest success rate was 2 ducks per youth waterfowl hunter.
Glenwood	With the drought conditions, and low water levels last year we had summer and winter mortality of fish, resulting in an increase in water quality and an increase in submerged and emergent plants. This year's dry weather has resulted in lower water levels but in most cases this will not affect accessibility on most of the smaller wetlands. This could change in the near future if we continue with dry warm weather.	There are good numbers of Blue wing teal, Mallards, Gadwall and an assortment of other puddle and diver ducks around. This should make for a good opener across the work area. As stated in the habitat conditions, although it has been dry the water levels have yet to drop enough to affect accessibility of hunters. This should allow hunters to spread out and not be in high competition with each other. Although it has been a relatively dry year it has also been for the most part on the cool side. This is forecasted to continue on opener with comfortable afternoon temps and dry weather.	With the good numbers of ducks and good weather forecasted this should shape up to be a good start to the 2013 season.
<b>Central</b>			
Carlos Avery WMA	Water levels are low in most of the pools, but slightly higher than 2012 levels. The wild rice crop is generally good, with ducks and geese feeding on the rice. Corn in the area is being chopped for silage.	No migration has been noted. Carlos Avery WMA has been very dry since the middle of July. Anoka County is classified as severe drought in the Sept. 17 U.S. Drought Monitor report.	Youth waterfowl day hunters averaged 1.8 ducks per hunter, mostly wood ducks, with some teal and mallards.

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Little Falls	<p>Officially still in a light to moderate drought, but two moderate rain events the past couple weekends have provided up to 3" in some locations, and water levels have increased in area wetlands, especially those with large watersheds and flow-through water courses. Still, some isolated wetlands with small watersheds are very low and/or dry, and access will be difficult in some areas. Wild rice is noticeably shorter than last year, but production caught up later in the summer and ended up experiencing a near average crop, and some ricers reported bumper crop. Those basins that experienced large rain events and water level bounces through late-June have less rice than previous couple of years.</p>	<p>Duck production was surprisingly good considering the late-, cold, and wet spring and early-summer. Duck broods were observed on most basins through late-August. Wood duck production seemed particularly good. Wood ducks and teal have been moving around and grouping up throughout the work area, have been found on most wetlands, and pre-season teal numbers were pretty high through mid-week leading up to the opener. Some of the first migrant ring-necked ducks have been seen on larger wetlands and rice lakes. Some, but very few wigeon, pintail and gadwall observed in the area. Goose production was down 30-60% throughout work area this year, and no noticeable influx of molt migrants have occurred yet.</p> <p>Temperatures have become more seasonal the past week. The near-term forecast calls for highs in the 60s and lows in the 40s, with strong northwest winds a day or so before the opener. As a result many early-migrants that have built up may leave prior to the opener, although it may also bring in new migrants by this weekend.</p>	<p>Very few youth out on youth waterfowl day, and relatively fewer goose hunters afield during the early goose seasons thus far.</p> <p>Expecting a slightly above average duck opener due to early opening dates this year, but will ultimately be dependent on how teal and wood ducks respond to stronger winds and dropping temperatures this week prior to the opener.</p>
Sauk Rapids	<p>The drought in central MN dried up very shallow wetlands and drastically lowered others. In many cases this has improved feeding and resting areas for waterfowl. Crop harvest timing may be slightly later than normal this year.</p> <p>This has been an above average year for wild rice. White oak acorns are very abundant this year.</p>	<p>Expected influx of molt migrant giant Canada geese has not occurred to any degree yet.</p> <p>There are fair numbers of mallards and wood ducks in central MN.</p> <p>Recent rains have not improved water levels of wetlands. Soils remain dry.</p>	<p>Canada goose hunting has been slow with a few exceptions.</p> <p>Youth hunt was slow as well.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Cambridge	Excellent wild rice crop in the work area this year. Rice crop on Onamia improved greatly from recent years. Water levels remain low throughout area.	Good numbers of local ducks including mallards and woods ducks. Good number of ducks on German Lake.	Good reports from Youth Waterfowl day near Onamia and Cambridge.
Sherburne NWR	Moderate drought conditions continue. Water levels are very low on the St. Francis River which should allow walk-in hunters to wade the river on the south end of our Refuge. Long Pool, a traditional duck hunting water body, has normal water levels providing boat access to areas of this water body. The wild rice crop on our Refuge impoundments is excellent this year.	During the youth waterfowl hunt, wood ducks were seen flying in the St. Francis River Valley.	Two youth waterfowl hunters harvested one wood duck on the St. Francis River during the youth waterfowl hunt.
Mille Lacs WMA	Water levels are below average and access to some pools may be more difficult. Received 2.5" of precip in the last week which helps. Poor rice crops overall but very good annuals with the low water levels	Good numbers of teal and wood ducks in the area. Increased goose activity in the area with a snow and blue goose mixed in with 1 flock of dark geese. Some mallards present as well.	Youth hunters had good shooting opportunities with lots of birds around. Pressure was spotty with most hunters focusing at Dewitt Pool.
<b>Southwest</b>			
Swan Lake (Nicollet)	Parts of the Nicollet Wildlife Area are extremely dry (Nicollet, McLeod, and Sibley Counties). Seasonal and semi-permanent basins are dry with shallow lakes and permanent basins having low water levels. The Southern and Eastern Counties still have water in Semi Permanent wetlands due to extreme Spring flooding, Southern Blue Earth County, Faribault and LeSueur.	Have not observed molt migrate geese yet. Good numbers of teal and wood ducks. The lakes and wetlands that do have water are in excellent vegetative state due to natural draw down last year due to drought.  Late duck broods were observed late in many areas, expect a large number of young ducks.	Goose hunting has been good. Reports on youth hunt were mixed with hunters reporting not as good of shooting as 2012.

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Slayton	Most wetlands have adequate water and are in good conditions. Some corn fields have been chopped.	Duck numbers are low mostly BWT with some mallards and wood ducks in the area. 0.10-.50 inch of rain on Thurs. Forecasted temps in the lower 70s, clear skies and windy for the opening weekend.	No feedback from the youth hunt.
Lac qui Parle WMA	<p><b>Marsh Lake and Upper LQP Lake</b>– water levels slightly below normal. Hunters should expect to encounter more rocks and to find mudflats and/or just a few inches of water around cattail points.</p> <p>Habitat west of Marsh Lake – backwater channels are holding water unlike last opener.</p>	<p>Canada goose numbers increased during the past two weeks with the influx of molt migrant giant Canada geese.</p> <p>Teal and wood duck numbers remain strong and typical number of mallards. No appreciable migrations noted.</p>	<p>Local goose hunting success increased with the addition of molt migrants.</p> <p>We expect good duck opener on the unit. Local duck numbers strong but concentrated which is typical. Scouting is critical!</p>
Talcot Lake WMA	Water levels are low and shallow wetlands are dry.	No migrations observed. Goose numbers are low. Weather conditions have been warm and dry.	Not really any hunting activity due to low goose numbers. Dove hunters have been successful.
Willmar	Area is under drought to severe drought conditions. Many wetlands dry, lake levels low, mud flats abound. Crop harvest limited to small grain and specialty crops. Some corn silage taken off fields.	<p>A slight movement of Canada geese into and over the area has been noted over the last few days, otherwise no other migration seen. Local duck populations seem to be much lower than they were last year at this time.</p> <p>Today is hot and humid with highs expected in the mid-80s. Cold front is expected to arrive in the area the afternoon/evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> with NW wind and cooler temps. ushered in for the weekend.</p>	<p>The August and Sept. goose hunting was spotty with lightly scattered success. Youth hunt activity was noticeably down from last year as was the success of those participating. Would expect the opening weekend success this year to be down from last year.</p> <p>Would expect birds to be more concentrated due to drought conditions.</p>

Area	Habitat conditions	Waterfowl migrations and weather conditions	Hunter Activity and Success
Windom	Generally marshes are low but in very good condition for waterfowl. Water levels are higher than last year, but last year was an exceptionally dry year. We may see some shallow wetlands losing all water in the near future without additional rainfall.	Weather has been very warm and dry. This year's local duck production looked good. Waterfowl numbers seemed to drop from early August. Only in the last week have blue-winged teal (BWT) numbers started to increase some again. Right now it appears there will be fair numbers of BWT, wood duck, and mallard for the opener.	The early goose season success was reported as very poor in general. The youth hunt was fair with most reports that ducks numbers were lower than other years. Outlook for the duck opener is fair unless teal continue to move into the area.

## Waterfowl Count Data, week of September 16, 2013.

Area	Date	Swans this week	Canada geese			Ducks				Coot this week	Comments
			Number seen <sup>a</sup> :			Number seen:			This weeks duck Species - % composition <sup>b</sup>		
			This week	Last count	Last year	This week	Last count	Last year			
<b>NORTH CENTRAL</b>											
Beltrami/Clearwater County	9/16	75	350	NS	800	2,000	NS	7,000	72% BWT, 22% MAL, 6% RN	300	
Winni/Bowstring area or Chippewa Nat. Forest N	9/16	30	350	NS	550	1,000	NS	6,000	61% MAL, 21% RN, 18% BWT	100	Partial survey
Leech Lake/Deer River Chippewa Nat. Forest S				NS	500		NS	19,000			No survey
Brainerd/Wadena area	9/16	0	50	NS	125	250	NS	1,000	43% WD, 37% MAL, 15% BWT, 5% HOOD	10	
Rice Lake NWR					1,500			5,300			No report
<b>WEST CENTRAL</b>											
Tamarac NWR	9/17	115	120	NS	400	7,800	NS	4,130	43% RN, 42% MAL, 15% WD	40	
<b>CENTRAL</b>											
Carlos Avery WMA	9/18	10	200	NS	200	800	NS	500	53% WD, 40% MAL, 7% BWT	0	
Sherburne NWR	9/18	20	5,000	NS	1,500	7,800	NS	6,000	67% WD, 13% MAL, 12% RN, 8% BWT	0	
<b>SOUTHWEST</b>											
Lac Qui Parle WMA	9/18	0	300	NS							
Murray Co. lakes & wetlands	9/19	0	75	NS	500	2,500	NS	1,200	80% BWT, 20% MAL	0	
Talcot Lake WMA	9/19	0	100	NS	200						

<sup>a</sup> - 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.

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