

October 29th, 2014 – Aerial Waterfowl Inventory Blog

As usual, the refuges along the rivers fill up with ducks the week after the central zone duck season opens. Duck season began on October 25th for most of the Illinois River valley, and duck abundance increased 55% on the refuges from the previous week. We flew the waterfowl survey on October 29th and estimated 210,315 ducks in the Illinois River valley (IRV) which was only 11.5% below the 10-yr average for late October. Similarly, the Mississippi River had 130,890 ducks which was only 12.5 % below the 10-yr average on the Mississippi (www.bellrose.org). If you recall, duck numbers on the Mississippi have been running more than 50% below average for the last several surveys. Mallards appear to be the reason for the below average duck numbers. We are short about 50,000 mallards in the IRV when compared to the 10-yr average. The cold weather and northwest winds pushing through the central United States on Halloween may just bring the mallards we are looking for. A duck hunter can only hope!

Hunter success appeared to be about average for many areas along the Illinois River despite below average number of ducks. Hunting reports from site managers at state fish and wildlife areas in Marshall, Woodford, and Fulton counties were slightly higher than average harvest for opening weekend. However, duck harvest was 5-47% below average for the Mississippi River Area near the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers on opening weekend.

Pintail numbers have been running well above average along both rivers; however, recent pintail numbers dropped 40% in the IRV from the previous week. Weather radar documented this movement of birds out of central Illinois on the evening of October 28th. This exodus of waterbirds can be seen leaving the refuges from Chillicothe to Beardstown at sunset on the 28th <http://weather.rap.ucar.edu/radar/displayRad.php?icao=KILX&prod=bref1&bkgr=black&endDate=20141029&endTime=1&duration=2>

Be safe and happy hunting! Stay tuned for more updates next week.....