



Ducks Unlimited Canada
CANADA'S CONSERVATION COMPANY

Early Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

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Recent rains have improved habitat conditions in southern Ontario and the Peace parkland of Alberta and British Columbia. With a few exceptions, habitat conditions are now good or better throughout Canada. Early reports indicate that waterfowl production should be good overall.

Spring precipitation has been slightly below average in coastal **British Columbia**, but conditions are still very good. Wetlands are full from recent rains and marsh vegetation is thriving. The first broods of Canada geese and mallards are enjoying the marshes. The spring freshet on the Fraser was earlier than normal. Agriculture in the Lower Fraser Delta is progressing well, with large tracts of land planted in potatoes and perennial forage, a staple food for waterfowl. Snow geese and other migrants have left the region.

In the central Interior, spring precipitation has been above normal in the north (Prince George) and below normal in the south (Williams Lake, Quesnel). Wetlands did not benefit from the below-average winter snowpack, and conditions are good in the north and fair in the south. Bird estimates and production potential are about normal for most areas, but brood potential is a concern for the dry country west of Williams Lake.

Spring precipitation has been above average in the southern Interior. Temperatures were very warm in mid-May, which resulted in a rapid high elevation snowmelt and high river levels; however, wetlands did not recharge much. Middle and high elevation wetlands are in good shape, but low elevation wetlands are drying fast. Bird seasonal chronology, breeding estimates and production potential seem about normal for mid and high elevation wetlands. At lower elevations, brood conditions will likely be only fair.

In the southeast Interior, spring precipitation has been average, in general, with slightly drier conditions in the Upper Columbia. Conditions in the region are still rated good.

The Peace region has received good recent rains, and spring/early summer precipitation is now normal. Uplands are greening up nicely, and despite the below-average winter snowpack and runoff, wetlands have recharged and conditions are good. Goose broods were about average; mallards were a week or two early, reflecting spring conditions; and goldeneye broods have now shown up. Breeding waterfowl numbers are average and comparable to last year. Brood potential is very good, as with last year, due to the timely rains and good cover conditions.

Unsettled weather during May brought precipitation to all areas of **Alberta**. The rain has maintained wetland water levels and habitat conditions are largely unchanged. The rain

relieved the dry conditions that have persisted for much of the past year in the Peace parkland and the northwestern boreal transition zone. Precipitation totals were highest in the Peace parkland, (greater than 120 mm), followed by the boreal transition zone, where many areas received 80 to 100 mm. Some locally heavy rains were also reported in the northeast aspen parkland. The westcentral aspen parkland received the least amount of precipitation (20 to 30 mm). Precipitation was variable in the Prairies, ranging from 80 to 90 mm in the north, to 30 to 40 mm in the southeast. Soil moisture reserves are extremely high over much of the Prairies, aspen parkland and boreal transition zone relative to the long term normal, with similar reserves occurring less than once every 30 years. In the Peace parkland, soil moisture reserves are now near normal with some extremely low reserves appearing on the eastern edge of the northern tip of the Peace parkland. Spring seeding is near completion with some delays occurring in the eastern aspen parkland. Rain and warm weather have stimulated crop and forage growth, improving nesting cover for re-nesting and mid- to late-nesting ducks.

Anecdotal reports from the CWS/USFW Waterfowl Breeding Population Surveys indicate vastly improved pond and waterfowl numbers from 2005 on many survey transects in southern and eastern Alberta. Northern pintail, blue-winged teal and northern shoveler appear to be benefiting from the improved wetland conditions in these areas. The Calgary-Red Deer-Edmonton corridor was drier than normal and the Peace parkland was much drier than normal with many ponds downgraded. The early duck production prognosis is good to very good in the east, south and southwest and fair in the westcentral and northwest.

In **Saskatchewan**, wetlands in the parklands remain in good to excellent condition as a result of regular rainfall and cool weather. Many of the creeks in the parklands that are normally dry at this time of year are still flowing and most of the DUC projects are at or well above full supply level. Priority habitat program areas such as the Thickwood Hills, Touchwood Hills, Allan Hills, and Upper Assiniboine all have good to excellent wetland conditions. Conditions are drier in the Prairies, with the Missouri Coteau and southeast having fair to good wetland conditions and the southwest region having fair wetland conditions. Recent rains (1 - 2 inches) across the prairies should help to improve wetland conditions. Seeding across most of the Province is nearing completion, but has been significantly delayed in the northeast due to the wet conditions, and crops have drowned due to the standing water in the fields.

Canada Goose broods have been observed across the Province and broods of mallard, northern pintail, and canvasback have been observed with mallard being the most common. Preliminary reports from the CWS/USFW Waterfowl Breeding Population Surveys suggest dabbler and diver numbers will be up compared to last year's numbers.

Southwestern **Manitoba** continues to receive regular rain, and wetlands remain in excellent shape. The frequent rainfall has also ensured that the wetlands reclaimed by the high water levels of this spring and last remain untilled. Much of the region has received 70 to 80mm of rain over the last month with the extreme southwest receiving up to 100mm. Total precipitation now ranges from 85 to 115 percent of average, adding to

already favourable wetland conditions. Class III and IV wetlands remain inundated. Fringe vegetation is totally flooded and wetlands in many areas are flooded beyond their usual borders. Most Class II wetlands also remain wet and sheet water is forming in the Class I basins after each rainfall, indicating that soil moisture levels are high.

Canada goose broods are abundant throughout the region. Other waterfowl broods have not been observed as frequently as expected. This could be attributed to the slightly late arrival of spring weather and waterfowl, and the abundance of flooded cover, which is biasing general observations for early nesting birds (pintail and mallard). Despite the lack of observations, nesting and breeding conditions are very good to excellent throughout southwestern Manitoba, and high waterfowl production is expected in the region this year. The only drawback for waterfowl this season may be earlier haying dates; upland vegetation including alfalfa is rapidly growing. Large flocks of molt migrant Canada Geese are starting to form, but little northward travel has been observed thus far.

In the **Western Boreal Forest**, a cool spring, abundant precipitation and some late heavy snowfalls in the north have improved conditions in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Habitat conditions in northern British Columbia and northern Alberta remain below average. Low water levels are particularly noticeable in rivers and streams in northern Alberta. Conditions are average to above average further south in the boreal fringe of the Prairie Provinces and in the remainder of the region.

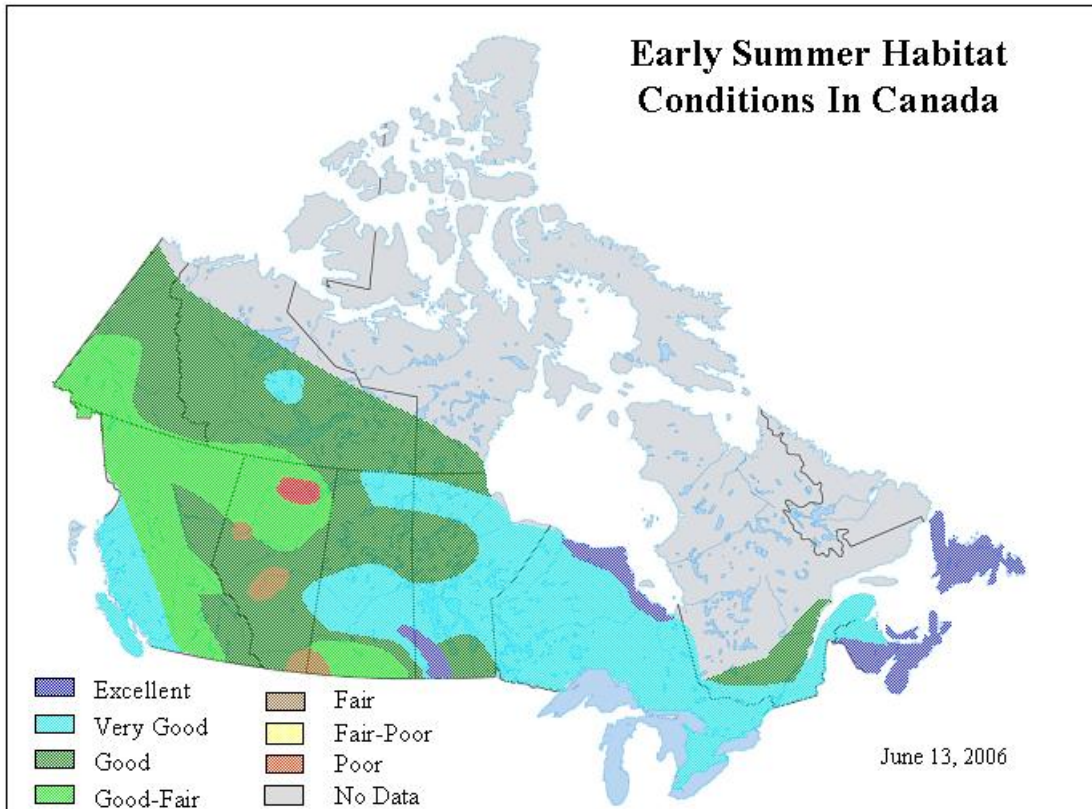
Based on initial waterfowl surveys, it appears that the waterfowl breeding effort in the Western Boreal Forest is very strong this year. In the Yukon, white-winged scoter, surf scoter, mallard, and ring-necked ducks were abundant; blue-winged teal and ruddy ducks also appeared in greater numbers than expected; and American wigeon numbers appeared to be low. The survey crew noted that ring-necked ducks outnumbered scaup. Water levels were high in the Yukon and habitat conditions were described as good. In northern Alberta, overall species richness and numbers of waterbirds were truly impressive. The prevalent species were ring-necked ducks, mallard, bufflehead, and green-winged teal. American wigeon and blue-winged teal were abundant. Groups of migrating scaup were frequently observed, with the largest flock estimated at 250 birds. Habitat conditions in this area are below average, although conditions were good in 2005, possibly indicating a high recruitment rate of 2005 hatch year ducks. Surveys in northern Saskatchewan did not show the same numbers of waterbirds as in northern Alberta and the Yukon. The survey crew indicated that the landscape was scattered with big, deep-water Canadian-shield lakes, which held small groups of divers, loons, and mergansers – few dabbling duck species were observed. In Melfort, Saskatchewan, along the boreal transition zone, habitat conditions and waterbird counts are very good.

Wet weather in May has greatly improved the habitat picture across **Ontario**. Wetland conditions are currently rated as very good throughout the lower Great Lakes region of the Province, as habitats have been recharged to full capacity. Temperatures have generally been above normal throughout the Province and this warm weather trend is welcomed as the hatch gets underway. The breeding effort appears typical, but early-season production confirms that initial nesting was ahead of schedule. Wet weather was

also the norm for central and northwestern Ontario; however, the Claybelt region of northeastern Ontario generally received less than normal precipitation amounts for the month. Despite this variation in rainfall, habitat conditions throughout the north continue to be rated as very good and preliminary survey results suggest good duck numbers. An early spring coupled with excellent habitat conditions is boding well for southern James Bay population geese, Mississippi Valley population geese and Atlantic population geese and production is expected to be very good.

Habitat conditions continue to be good for the month of May across all regions of **Quebec**. Temperatures were above average and the regions of Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa received significant amounts of precipitation with flooding in some areas. As a result, the water levels in the St. Lawrence were 10 cm above the average for this time of year. The first broods were observed at St. Peter Lake and in the Estrie region in mid-May with many duck pairs observed further north in the Gaspé region. The overall production projection this year is good to very good.

Habitat conditions in **Atlantic Canada** are very good to excellent. A warm spring with moderate to heavy rainfall has provided perfect nesting and production habitat and water levels in DUC wetlands and seasonal wetlands are good. Some areas such as the St. John River floodplain are experiencing water levels that are equal to levels of the spring snowmelt, while other areas are slightly below normal. Overall breeding success is expected to be high and broods have been sighted in most wetlands. Brood production should be up from 2005, as very cold temperatures effected overall production last year.



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