



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

July 18, 2008

With a few exceptions, brood rearing habitat conditions are good-fair in the west and very good in the east; waterfowl production is generally expected to be average this year. The [2008 Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey](#) estimated the total duck population at 37.3 million birds. This number is 11 per cent above the long-term average, but represents a nine per cent decline compared to 2007.

Summer temperatures have arrived in the **British Columbia** coastal region. Precipitation was below average this spring, and very low over the past month. Brood habitat conditions are slightly below average, but production levels appear normal.

Unlike other B.C. regions, the Central Interior has received relatively high rainfall so far this year. Brood habitat conditions are good on average and upland conditions are very good. Production levels appear good so far, but breeding was delayed and many class Ia (1-6 days old) broods are still appearing.

There was very little precipitation in the Southern Interior in the past month, and brood habitat conditions have declined slightly. Production levels appear good so far, but breeding was delayed and many class Ia (1-6 days old) broods are still appearing.

Spring was relatively dry in the West Kootenays of the Southeast Interior, and brood habitat conditions are below average. The East Kootenays have received much more rain, and conditions there are good.

Conditions in the Peace region have deteriorated due to a lack of rain, and projects are at reduced water levels. The agricultural situation is poor, with hay crops below average and cereal crops heading out early due to the lack of moisture. Pair numbers were up compared to last year, but broods are smaller than average and a bit delayed.

Most of **Alberta** has received below average precipitation in the past month, but precipitation totals for the growing season (from April 1) remain average to above average in the prairies and much of the southern aspen parkland. Dry to average conditions continue to prevail in much of the boreal transition zone (BTZ) and Peace Parkland. Spring and summer temperatures have been cool throughout the agricultural zone of Alberta.

Periodic showers and locally heavy rains associated with thunderstorm activity have maintained and locally improved wetland habitats in the prairies and much of the southern aspen parkland. The thunderstorms have also brought hail and damaging winds to some locales. Brood habitat conditions are rated as fair to good in the prairies and good in the southern parkland, particularly in the Buffalo Lake and Pine Lake landscapes

and eastern parkland. The north and central parkland has seen some improvement and conditions are rated as fair to good.

The northern aspen parkland and BTZ have recently been somewhat drier resulting in some deterioration in wetland condition. However, scattered thunderstorm activity has generally maintained fair to good brood habitat conditions.

The Peace Parkland has been drier than the southern part of the province. In particular, precipitation in the southern area is well below normal. Conditions are rated as fair in the north and fair to poor in the south.

In the southern part of the province Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) staff report an abundance of broods, particularly of late-nesting ducks. These species appear to have responded to the improved wetland conditions in the later spring and early summer.

The 2008 annual USFW/CWS spring breeding waterfowl population survey for Alberta indicates little change in overall duck numbers from 2007. Combined with spring and summer breeding habitat conditions an average production year is anticipated for Alberta.

Haying activity is currently underway; periodic showers and thunderstorms have somewhat delayed the hay harvest. Pastures in the southern part of the province are in good condition and are providing good nesting cover for later nesting ducks.

In general, wetland habitat conditions in Saskatchewan are fair-poor in the prairies and good-fair in the parklands. Temperatures across much of the province have been slightly below normal for June and early July, and rainfall amounts have varied from 25-150 mm depending on the area. The recent rains have helped to maintain wetland levels in the parklands and will help to provide water for broods. Good numbers of broods are being observed across the parklands and there is still some evidence of breeding activity including three-bird flights. Most males are now in bachelor groups on larger wetlands. The majority of broods are still class I (1-18 days old) and consist mainly of blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, gadwall, and mallards. The Missouri Coteau is still quite dry and little brood production is expected from this area whereas the Thickwood Hills, Allan/Dana Hills, and Touchwood Hills should have fair to good production.

Crops are slightly delayed with the cooler temperatures and haying operations have started. The recent moisture has helped pasture and haylands, and crops should catch up if they get some warmer temperatures. The latest rainfall events have also brought hail to some areas of the province which damaged some crops.

Southwestern Manitoba has received frequent rain in the last month, which has stabilized habitats in most areas and provided a favourable setting for brood rearing waterfowl and reneating birds. More rain is needed to keep these stressed wetlands at a stable level for brood rearing, but at this time has had a very positive effect on some otherwise bleak conditions in the Manitoba pothole region. Much of the region has received just below average rainfall, with the areas of Virden, Brandon and Minnedosa and McCreary having average total precipitation. Seasonal (Class III) wetlands which were previously dry in late May are now holding water, but some semi-permanent (Class IV) basins are showing mudflats around perimeters in the more southern areas.

Preliminary reports from USFWS/CWS waterfowl surveys have confirmed field observations of dry spring conditions and lower initial pair settling in southwest Manitoba. May pond counts were down 27% from last year and 12% below the long-term average. This is reflective of the dry conditions in the region in the last year. Pair counts were down from last year and down 21% from the long-term average. Numbers of mallard, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, redhead and canvasback were all down from last year. Surprisingly, pintail numbers were nearly double that of last year, but still dramatically below the long-term average. On the plus side, brood sizes are average and broods are becoming more common, indicating a good initial hatch, albeit later than most years.

Upland cover is below average this year as vegetation is delayed due to a late spring, dry conditions early in the season and cool temperatures. However, the weather has delayed the hay harvest, which will improve nest success in these cover types.

Much of the **Western Boreal Forest** received a well deserved deposit of precipitation during this last month and habitat conditions are now generally good to fair. With a slow start to the spring and the breeding season, things consequently still lag. Many broods look small in their growth, but there appears little reason for any concern.

In northeast Saskatchewan and through much of boreal Saskatchewan, the rain has finally come. A dry season was well underway in early July with rampant fires in the north and a fire ban in effect. Since then, the weather has been quite unsettled with rain, hail and even tornado watches. Precipitation has come in short downpours and longer lighter rains. Water conditions are now good and production is good as well. A variety of broods have been spotted including mallards, blue-winged teal, green-wing teal, shovelers and others. Groups of bachelor males have also been observed.

In the Yukon, cool days have brought ample precipitation, leading to good water conditions. Along the MacMillan River and through the central Yukon, good brood numbers have been observed, including species such as mallard, American wigeon, green-winged teal and others. Other diving species, including goldeneye and bufflehead, have been seen on ponds near the Alaska border.

Wet weather continues to be the story across **Ontario** with several locations reporting record-breaking rainfalls for June. This ample precipitation coupled with the return of warmer, more seasonal temperatures, has maintained very favourable habitat conditions throughout the province. Water levels in many wetlands are higher than normal for this time of year, which is providing an abundance of quality emergent habitat for brood rearing and molting waterfowl. Habitat conditions have improved in the south-west and are rated as good, while the south-central and south-eastern regions remain in very good condition. These frequent rain events continued to delay haying operations in the south, which has benefited reneating waterfowl, as evidenced by recent sightings of very young broods. Conditions also remain very good across northern Ontario, where temperatures are near normal and rainfall totals continue to climb well above average, ensuring that wetlands remain fully charged for waterfowl.

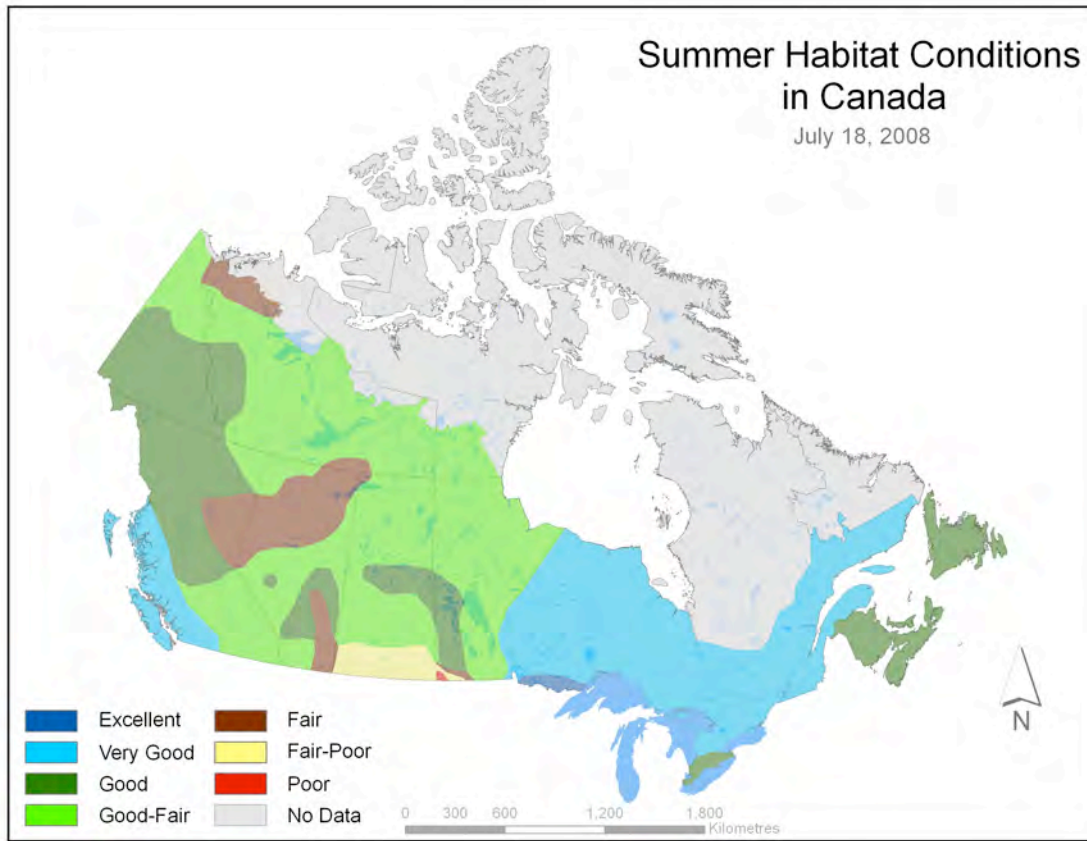
Field reports are noting a wide range in brood age classes from Ia (1-6 days old) to III (22-60 days old), confirming that the breeding effort was protracted, which is on par for Ontario. Unfortunately, despite the favourable breeding conditions, both pair and

brood sightings have been relatively sparse this year, which may be the result of the abundance of available habitat, however, on an up note, brood sizes are above average in many cases. Although spring phenology was late in 2008 on both the Southern James Bay Population (SJBP) and Mississippi Valley Population (MVP) ranges, production from the SJBP Canada geese is expected to be average, while that from the MVP Canada geese is likely to be poor due to widespread failed breeding rather than a significant decline in indicated breeding pairs. Overall, waterfowl production for 2008 is projected to be average for Ontario.

In **Quebec**, June temperatures were below average in the eastern regions of Côte-Nord and Bas St-Laurent and slightly above normal in the western regions of Abitibi, Ottawa, Estrie and Montreal. With the exception of Montreal and Trois-Rivières, most regions received above average precipitation in the last month. The Quebec region had 109% more precipitation than average, and Lac St-Jean and Estrie regions had 80% more precipitation than average. The level of the St. Lawrence River at the Lac St-Pierre station was 0.2 m higher than the average. Water levels are very good in wetlands throughout the province as a result of the abundant precipitation.

The high water levels of Lac St-Pierre and the Ottawa River are providing ducks with an abundance of brood habitat that is typically not available at this time of the year. The high temperatures combined with the generous precipitation are providing good brood habitat, but could also have a negative impact on nesting success on the other hand. At this time, the production has been good–fair throughout the province. The majority of mallard broods are still quite young, but clutch size is generally large.

Atlantic Canada has experienced average to above average temperatures over the last month and below average precipitation. Although rain has been less frequent than in past summers there has been no apparent affect on waterfowl production. Reports of broods ranging in numbers and age classes have been received and will put regional production levels in line with previous years. Water levels in DUC-managed wetlands have remained favourable for waterfowl even with lower precipitation amounts. Overall, waterfowl production and brood habitat conditions are good over the entire region.



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