



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

Early Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

June 20, 2008

Much of the prairies recently received ample rain, which has helped to maintain or improve habitat conditions, especially in Alberta. Habitat conditions are now generally very good in the east and fair-good in the west. Cool spring weather across the country has delayed waterfowl nesting, but early reports indicate that production should be good this year. Results from the CWS/USFW May Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey will be available in July.

Following some warm weather over the May long weekend, temperatures have been unseasonably cool in coastal **British Columbia**. Snowmelt peaked on May 25th in the Lower Mainland and water levels have since receded. Agricultural activities have been delayed with the cooler weather, but most fields have now been planted. Canada geese, mallards, and wood ducks have been observed with broods.

Temperatures have been unseasonably cool in the central Interior of British Columbia. Wetland conditions are good on average, except in the Chilcotin, which is still relatively dry after a poor snowpack. Upland conditions are good in the central Interior due to recent rains, except in the Nechako area. Breeding was delayed in the region, and the first broods appeared a week or two later than usual.

The weather has been cool and relatively wet over the past month in the southern Interior. Consequently, wetlands have maintained their status, and conditions have actually improved overall. Breeding was delayed in the region, and broods appeared later than usual, with the first broods of mallards and Barrow's goldeneye appearing in June.

Temperatures have also been unseasonably cool in the southeast Interior. Conditions in the East Kootenays have been markedly wetter than normal, but the West Kootenays have been somewhat dry.

Precipitation has been patchy this spring in the Peace region, and near or a little below average since April 1. Uplands are in good condition, but many wetlands remain below normal levels. Early duck numbers appear close to average with some exceptions including above average numbers of blue-winged teal. The first broods have just begun to appear, and the oldest broods of mallard, Canada goose and buffleheads are roughly two weeks old (age class 1b).

The weather in much of the agricultural zone of **Alberta** has been unsettled for the past month with temperatures at or below normal. All areas now report slightly below average to above average precipitation totals. The prairies have received the most precipitation over the past month with precipitation totals since April 1 ranging from 110% of average in Brooks to 173% in Calgary. Fifty to 150 mm of rain fell in areas around Calgary and south and west to Lethbridge during a storm event June 9-12. Other

locations have also received locally heavy rainfalls in the past month. High stream flow advisories have been in effect for much of the southern Foothills. As a result habitat conditions have been improving in the prairies, and are now rated fair to good.

The southwest aspen parkland has experienced similar weather to the prairies, but areas to the east are drier. Precipitation totals since April 1 range from 101% of average in Coronation to 128% in Red Deer. Locally heavy rainfall events (75-100 mm) have recharged semi-permanent wetlands and flooded some previously dry seasonal and temporary ponds. Areas east of Stettler-Camrose, including the Viking moraine, are rated fair with pockets of poor. In the west the Pine Lake and Buffalo Lake landscapes are rated fair to good.

The northern aspen parkland and boreal transition zone (BTZ) have recently experienced slightly drier and warmer weather. Precipitation totals are close to average for the growing season, maintaining fair-good habitat conditions.

The Peace Parkland has also been drier than the southern part of the province with growing season precipitation near normal. Recent rains have maintained wetland water levels and conditions are fair.

Upland nesting cover is generally in good condition. Hay lands and pastures have responded well to the wetter weather and cooler temperatures. There appears to have been good grass carryover in the prairies and aspen parkland pastures as a result of reduced cattle numbers and excellent grass growth in 2007. Field crops are somewhat delayed and low areas may have been drowned out in some cases.

The 2008 CWS/USFW Waterfowl Breeding Population Survey report is not yet available. cursory observations by DUC staff suggest that dry conditions in the early spring in much of the prairies and aspen parkland may have resulted in ducks settling further north in the BTZ, Peace Parkland and boreal forest. However, there appears to be good numbers of birds in the prairie and parkland and broods are starting to hatch. Mallard, northern pintail, common goldeneye and northern shoveler broods have been reported. Canada geese broods are a common sight and goslings are maturing rapidly. Goose production may have been affected in some areas by late season snowfalls in April-May. Some goose and duck nests in low-lying areas may also have been flooded by the recent rains.

Wetland conditions in Saskatchewan are generally poor in the prairies and improve as you move north into the parklands where habitat conditions are good. Temperatures have also been cool across the province and up until the last two weeks there was little rain in the prairies or parklands. Recent rain events delivered 10-15 cm of precipitation to the southeast and 3-8 cm of precipitation across the rest of the province. The rain in the southeast improved wetland conditions, but most of the moisture went into the ground because the area was so dry prior to the rains. The Missouri Coteau is dry and wetlands are in poor condition, while areas such as the Thickwood Hills (northwest), Allan Hills (northcentral), Touchwood Hills (northcentral) and the Upper Assiniboine (northeast) areas have good wetland conditions.

Mallard and pintail broods that are one to two weeks old (age classes 1a and 1b) have been sighted in many areas across the province and the [SpATS](#) research crew found over 100 nests within the Allan Dana Hills (northcentral) study site. Interestingly, pairs of ducks and three-bird flights are still being observed on ponds throughout the

parklands, suggesting breeding effort may have been slightly delayed by the cool temperatures. Goose broods have been observed since late May and early June. Overall, the duck breeding effort should be good in the parklands but poor in the prairies.

Seeding is now complete across the province and crops are beginning to emerge with the recent rains. The rain should help grass growth and pasture and hayfields should also see some improvement with the rain. In early June some producers were seeding wetland basins that had dried up since the beginning of spring.

Cool temperatures have prevailed in southwestern **Manitoba** and precipitation has been common and widespread in recent weeks, having a very positive effect on some otherwise bleak conditions in the region. Much of the breeding areas north and south of Brandon received 10 cm of precipitation in the past two weeks with the exception of the Shoal Lake region, which received slightly less. This was much needed rain, especially in the most southern areas near Deloraine and Killarney. Total rainfall this growing season is now average or slightly below average. The rainfall comes too late for migrating and settling waterfowl, but it should help to recharge brood rearing wetlands and encourage re-nesting. The rain has stabilized habitats in the area, but more rain is needed to keep these stressed wetlands at a stable level for brood rearing.

Seeding was completed early throughout Manitoba's prairie pothole region, but the cool temperatures and dry soil had an effect on germination. Crop growth is delayed, but the recent rain should provide some relief provided we get some heat to go with it; current forecasts predict more normal temperatures for the remainder of June. Hay crops are slower-growing as well, and this may result in increased hatch from these habitats as hay harvest is expected to be later than normal. Winter wheat crops have suffered somewhat this season due to a lack of insulating snow cover and poor soil moisture conditions.

The first Canada goose brood was spotted on May 15th and the first hatched mallard nest was reported by the [SpATS](#) study on May 29th. Both of these hatching dates are a little later than normal as a result of the delayed spring thaw and extended winter conditions. The lack of duck brood observations also indicate a later than normal nesting season. Preliminary [SpATS](#) study pair counts indicate a significant decline in pairs compared to the previous study year.

In general, spring has come on slowly in the **Western Boreal Forest** (WBF) with cool temperatures and below average precipitation. Many areas boast good water levels due to several consecutive years of above normal precipitation, but brood numbers still seem reflective of a slow cool spring. With the arrival of warmer temperatures and an advancing spring and summer, brood numbers should reflect the large number of waterfowl breeding pairs present in the WBF.

The Saskatchewan River Delta has not escaped the low spring precipitation levels. April and May have seen precipitation levels 75% lower than normal numbers. This has brought lake levels close to "normal" after consecutive years of above average precipitation. With adequate water levels, the only hindrance to nesting is the cool spring temperatures. Mallard and blue-winged teal broods have been observed, but nesting seems behind schedule.

South into the hills of the Duck Mountains in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, conditions are good to very good. Wetlands and waterways appear full or near so, with a variety of waterfowl species present. Broods have not yet been seen in great numbers with only one bufflehead brood spotted along with one mallard brood and a swan brood of five cygnets. Canada goose broods are numerous.

Through northcentral Saskatchewan precipitation has been mostly below normal, and spring has been slow in advancing. In the Melfort area, precipitation has been very low and ponds show signs of receding. However, conditions remain good with the ample precipitation received in recent years. Broods have been seen in very limited numbers although pair numbers are very good.

Around the Edmonton area conditions are good but again, few broods have been observed due to a late spring. Even few Canada goose broods have been spotted. Traveling further west into the Grande Prairie region, good pair numbers have been counted, including nesting swans.

From northeast British Columbia up through Trout Lake NWT and north, conditions are generally good to very good. Basins and waterways seem fully charged with plentiful rainfall. It's still early for waterfowl broods (one sandhill crane brood has been observed), though numerous species of waterfowl have been noted including goldeneye, ring-necked ducks, common mergansers, loons and trumpeter swans. Birds are paired up in many cases.

In the Yukon spring has been slow in its arrival, with an occasional snowfall as late as mid-June. Lakes are ice-free and it is early yet for brood observation. Temperatures have been cool and precipitation beyond snowfall has not yet been abundant. Various waterfowl species have been observed in good numbers.

Wetlands throughout **Ontario** are generally in good to very good condition as a result of recent wet weather that has them at full supply. Frequent rain events have improved water levels in southwestern Ontario and maintained favourable conditions throughout the central and southeastern regions of the province, which should be enough to sustain brood habitats during the course of the summer regardless of weather. The ample precipitation should also benefit renesting waterfowl as the wet conditions have generally delayed first hay cuts. Severe weather throughout northern Ontario pushed monthly rainfall totals to well above average, which continues to keep wetlands at capacity and in great shape for developing broods.

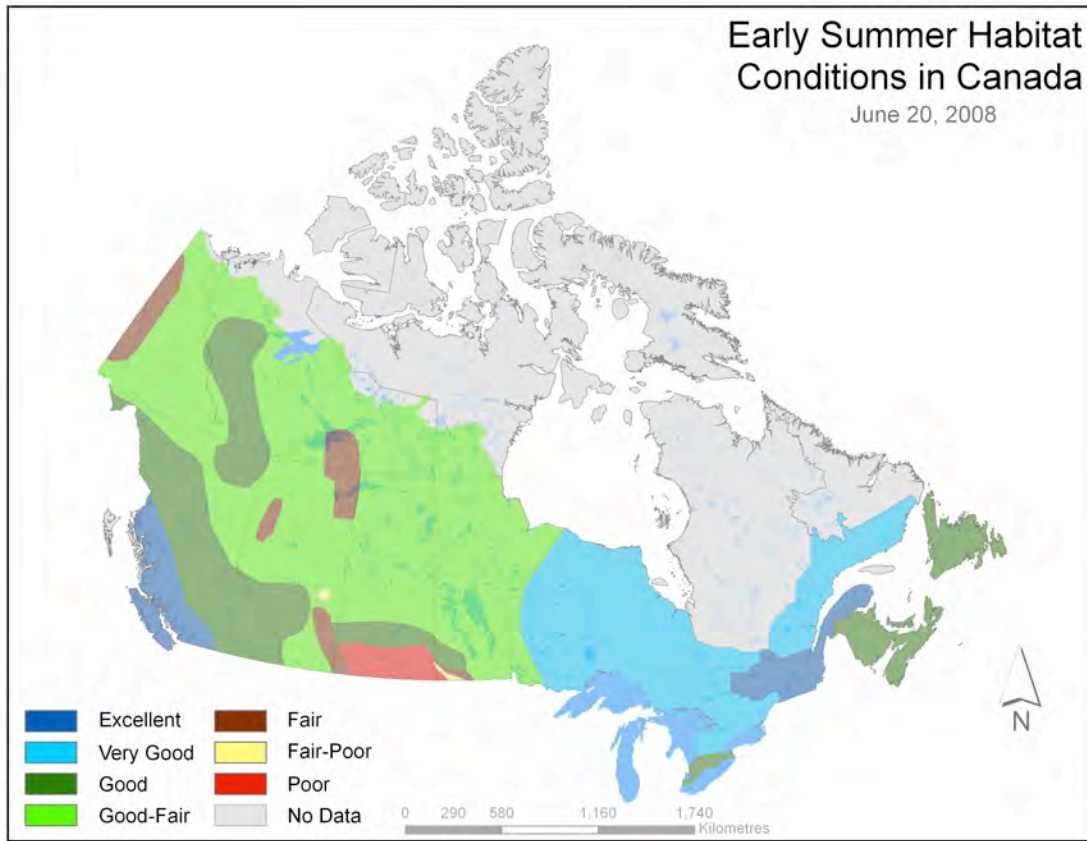
The unseasonably cool temperatures of May don't appear to be affecting early duckling survival, as recent sightings of mallard and wood duck broods indicate typical brood sizes for their respective age classes. Early results from the Black Duck Survey of central and northeastern Ontario look promising with overall bird numbers up, including an increase in black duck numbers. Both Southern James Bay Population and Atlantic Population Canada geese numbers were near average this spring, however, Mississippi Valley Population Canada geese numbers were down due to inclement weather. Overall, waterfowl production for 2008 is projected to be average for Ontario.

Temperatures in May were generally below average across **Quebec**. Precipitation was close to or below normal for all regions in the past month except in Quebec's northwest and Hudson Bay regions. However, in early May, eastern Quebec was affected

by a trough that delivered significant rainfall and caused flooding and soil movement that forced many road closures and evacuations. During this storm, Baie-Comeau recorded a new record rainfall of 106.5 mm on April 29. Between May 26 and 31, a low-pressure system caused several thunderstorms throughout the province. The St. Lawrence River remains high for this time of the year and major rivers and wetlands have a good water supply.

The risk of waterfowl nest flooding is low everywhere despite the recent storms. Nesting was slightly delayed for resident geese and early nesting ducks this year. Resident goose nest numbers have increased again in Varennes Island and the first broods were observed towards the end of May indicating a good breeding effort. At Lake St. Peter, large numbers of mallard broods have been reported since the beginning of June and flocks of dabbling duck males are still being observed. Waterfowl production should be good or better this year. Habitat conditions remain generally very good to excellent across Quebec and the high water levels should help ensure good brood rearing conditions. Spring was early on Bylot Island with above average temperatures and a low snowpack and very good breeding conditions are expected for snow geese.

Atlantic Canada has had above average rainfall and unseasonably cool temperatures in the past month and habitat conditions are good throughout the region. Initial reports indicate no adverse effect of the weather on the waterfowl production. Early broods of geese and ducks were reported throughout the region, with the exception of the Saint John River flood plain area. Overall success of nesting waterfowl is on par with previous years. The long-range forecast calls for more seasonable temperatures, which should provide favourable conditions for late-nesting waterfowl. Despite the poor spring weather, all indications are showing successful nesting attempts and good numbers of broods in various age classes.



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