

Habitat Report

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Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

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Habitat Reports Online

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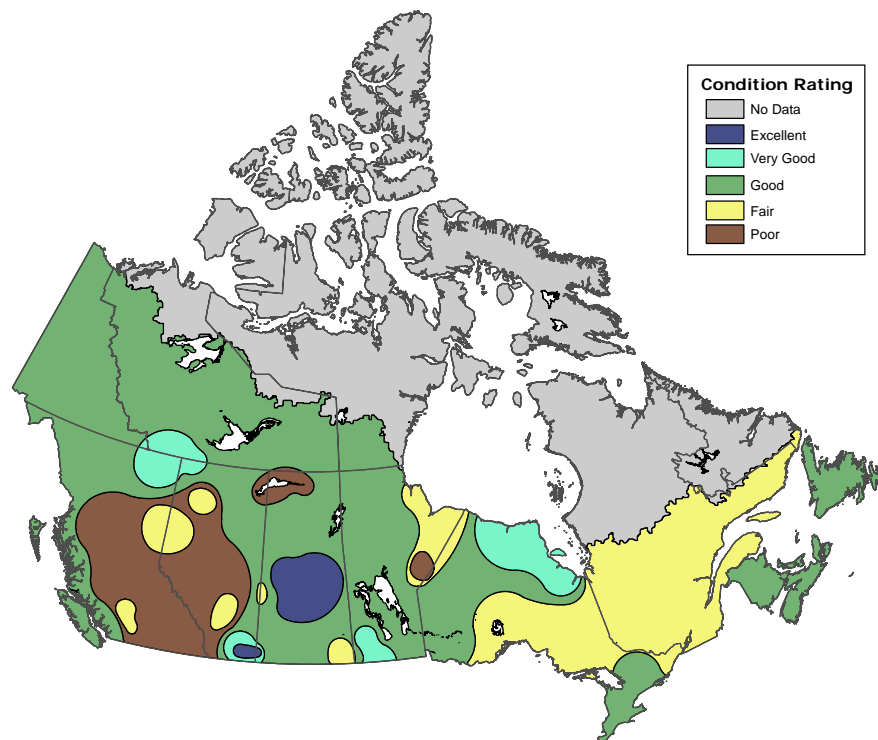
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The following is a compilation of impressions, collected from Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) field staff, of environmental conditions relative to breeding waterfowl. These observations are not based on systematic surveys, and are not intended to describe hunting conditions. This report should only be redistributed as a full PDF document, with DUC permission.

Early Summer Habitat Conditions in Canada

Summary

Precipitation amounts and production predictions are variable in the British Columbia / Western Boreal Forest region, where the Yukon migration concluded over the May long weekend. Most of the Prairie region has experienced significant precipitation amounts, and the production forecast ranges from fair in Saskatchewan to above average in southern Alberta and Manitoba. Production should be good through most of the Eastern region, despite low water levels in some areas.



British Columbia / Western Boreal Forest

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Along the coast, temperatures have been at or below normal for May and precipitation has been above normal. Snowpacks are melting slowly with the cool spring temperatures. Freshet is now peaking, but there are no concerns of flooding on major rivers. The outlook is currently good, although water supply challenges may develop during the summer, depending on precipitation. Local wetlands are full, and marsh vegetation is thriving. Farming around the lower mainland and Vancouver Island has been delayed with the cool, wet weather. This could lead to lower food production next winter, because cover crops will have less time to establish in the fall. Broods of Canada geese, wood ducks, mallards and blue-winged teals have been spotted in local wetlands.



Temperatures are still cool overall in the central Interior. Despite some spotty rains in May, precipitation has been below normal as well. Breeding effort appears depressed and broods are appearing later than usual.

In the southern Interior, recent rains supplemented spring precipitation so that it's now above average. The extra moisture and cool spring temperatures have improved water conditions in many wetlands. However, breeding effort may be lower than usual and broods a bit late. Recent rains recharged wetlands somewhat in the southeast Interior, but conditions are still relatively poor.

In the Peace region, accumulated spring precipitation has been average or above average for 2010. The May long weekend brought over an inch of rain, followed by up to a foot of wet snow. This second shot of moisture (following spring runoff) provided a much-needed boost for many Ducks Unlimited Canada projects that were running lower than normal. However, some project wetlands are still so dry that it will take a number of years to recharge them. Nest cover conditions are very good. Early spring temperatures, combined with shallow ground frost depths, resulted in early green-up of grasses and forbs. Timely rains supported lush growth and delivered very good upland conditions. Total numbers are down, possibly suggesting that waterfowl migrated through more quickly than usual. Canada goose and early mallard broods have been observed.



Central Interior, BC – Early June

WESTERN BOREAL FOREST

Water levels are below normal in most of the Yukon, where peak levels have been reached on many rivers including Ross River and Mayo River. Although precipitation was above normal in Whitehorse in May, this was some of its first precipitation since early winter. Temperatures have been above normal for the last few weeks. In many areas, extreme or high forest fire ratings have already been issued, which doesn't usually occur until mid to late June. Migration has concluded, with the passing of scoters and long-tailed ducks on the May long weekend. In the Northwest Territories, May precipitation was slightly below normal in Yellowknife and Hay River, but was above normal in Normal Wells and Fort Smith.



Areas of northern Alberta have received some much-needed rain. Although average May precipitation for Grande Prairie is typically 36.9 mm, that area received 89.8 mm this year, most of which came with a 54.9 mm rain event on the May 21. Precipitation has been below normal in High Level, while Peace River has had normal amounts. Edmonton has received twice its normal precipitation for May, including some snow at the end of the month. Through to the end of May, the Breeding Population and Habitat Survey conducted by USFWS/CWS (hereafter USFWS/CWS Survey) observed many flocked mallard drakes, indicating that hens are incubating. Although conditions were reported as dry, beaver ponds and large lake shorelines appeared ideal.

Any thoughts of a dry spring in northern Saskatchewan have been washed away in the heavy rains of the past few weeks. In many areas, locals report that they've experienced "three runoffs" this year. Rain events of 1 to 3 inches have occurred multiple times. Wetlands are full, with sheetwater still in the fields in June. Farmers have not completed spring seeding, and some may not get everything in the ground in time. A wide variety of duck species are being observed in very good numbers. With all the sheetwater, birds are spread out. Early breeding predictions and production numbers look very good.

It has been a wet spring in The Pas area of northern Manitoba. After the above average precipitation of April, the area has received 202% of its normal amounts. May temperatures were very close to average. Canada goose goslings were observed on May 20, along with a canvasback nest.

Prairie Canada

ALBERTA

Habitat conditions have continued to improve over the past few weeks, particularly in the Prairie portion of southern Alberta. Precipitation totals from April 1 to present are now average to well above average. Over the longer term, precipitation totals from September 2009 to present are now average across much of the province, except in parts of the Aspen Parkland, Boreal Transition Zone (BTZ) and Peace Parkland, which need additional moisture to fully recover from last year's drought.



The Prairie continues to be the main recipient of recent precipitation events. From May 24 to May 31, the south Prairie received 75 to 130 mm of precipitation in the form of rain and snow. Habitat conditions are excellent in the southeast (Cypress Hills), while the remainder of the south Prairie is very good and the north Prairie is rated as good. Preliminary field reports from USFWS/CWS Survey crews indicate increased pond numbers on the Prairie strata, compared to last year.

Moving north into the Aspen Parkland, moisture conditions have also improved, but wetland water levels remain below normal in many areas. Some ephemeral wetlands are present as a result of recent rain and snow. USFWS/CWS Survey crews are seeing fewer ponds in the Aspen Parkland compared to 2009. In northwest and central areas in particular, semi-permanent wetlands are dry or have extensive mudflats. These areas remain in poor condition, while the northeast and southwest Aspen Parkland are fair.



East Aspen Parkland, AB – Early June

A similar situation continues from the northwest Aspen Parkland into the BTZ and into areas of the Peace Parkland. The BTZ remains in poor condition, with semi-permanent and permanent wetlands in drawdown condition. Parts of the Peace Parkland (Grande Prairie and High Level) are now rated as fair while central areas remain poor. The Peace Parkland has received 85 mm of precipitation in the past month, including 15 cm of wet snow.

The agricultural community has welcomed the moisture. In addition to alleviating the possibility of forage and surface water shortages for cattle producers, the moisture has also stimulated grass growth and has improved nesting cover.

Canada goose broods are now a common sight, and some mallard and bufflehead broods have also been observed. The recent cold and snowy weather may have adversely affected nesting. However, the recent moisture and warming temperatures have stimulated breeding activity as evidenced by territorial pairs, lone drakes and three-bird flights.

USFWS/CWS Survey updates indicate that duck numbers have increased since 2009 on the Prairie strata, which likely reflects increased pond numbers. Further north, duck numbers appear to be down compared to last year. At this point, the production forecast is above average in the south and below average elsewhere.

SASKATCHEWAN

According to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Drought Watch Maps, this has been the wettest spring on record, with some areas receiving over 250 mm of rain since April 1. An abundance of sheetwater is present in agricultural fields, and water within more permanent wetlands reaches well beyond full supply levels. Some wetlands are so full that the water is spilling over into adjacent wetlands, making two wetlands look like one. For many areas of the province, more rain is forecast for this upcoming week.



In the Missouri Coteau, wetland conditions have dramatically improved with the spring rains and are now in much better shape than after snowmelt. Wetland conditions range from good to excellent across most of the central Parklands and in the east central areas, but are not as favourable along the Alberta border and in the extreme southeast corner of the province. In these areas, conditions were very dry before the rains came and much of the moisture has soaked into the ground.

Unfortunately, the rains came a little too late in the spring to greatly impact nesting efforts. USFWS/CWS Surveys showed that there was an abundance of water in the province, but not many birds to count. Wetland conditions were good to excellent in the Dakotas this spring, so it is possible that migrants stopped in those areas to breed. However, those birds that did breed in Saskatchewan will now have an abundance of water to take their broods to. Large bachelor groups of pintails and mallards are now common, and the first few broods of pintails and mallards have also been observed. Over-water nesters likely had some of their nests flooded due to the high water levels. Overall, production is expected to be fair.



Missouri Coteau, SK – Early June

Seeding has been delayed significantly due to the rains. Estimates by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture suggest that overall seeding is only 60% complete. In areas such as the northeast, that have had over 175 mm of rain, seeding is only 40% complete. These estimates are well behind the five-year average, as seeding is usually almost 90% complete by this time of year. Many of the crop insurance seeding deadlines have been extended due

to moisture levels. Cooler temperatures this past week have also resulted in frost damage to crops in localized areas. Although hay and pasture lands are in good to excellent condition, they now need some heat to help the grass grow.

MANITOBA

Although precipitation was lacking in April and early May, rain events are now common. Over the past two weeks, the entire breeding range in southwest Manitoba received well above average rainfall for this time of year. Accumulations for this spring now range from 150 to 175 mm, with approximately half that amount arriving within the past week.

These recent events have replenished wetlands throughout the major breeding landscapes of Killarney, Virden, and Minnedosa/Shoal Lake. Class IV wetland are now inundated or flooded just beyond the cattails. Class II wetlands, which were previously seeded, are now holding standing water in fields again. This will ensure excellent brood-rearing conditions for hatching birds, and has maintained habitats for late and renesting birds.

After the above average temperatures recorded in April and early May, temperatures returned to more seasonable ranges towards the end of May. This, coupled with the recent rains, is producing good cover for waterfowl nesting in grass and forage lands. Crop seeding is advanced this year, and the rapid development of winter and spring cereals should increase cover for renesting waterfowl.

Mallard, wood duck and common goldeneye broods are being reported, which suggests that this report is coinciding with the initial hatch of early-nesting waterfowl. Groups of six and seven bachelor mallards have been observed, indicating a successful first nesting effort, and this initial hatch is expected to be strong. Although some areas will endure severe flooding of nests, this is likely localized at the moment.



Near Rapid City, MB – Early June

Canada goose nesting is complete and showing good success. Large flocks of non-breeding birds have now formed, and recent observations have confirmed that these molt migrants have started moving north.

Although May pond levels are thought to be average this year, they will now be sustained with recent precipitation. This rainfall may cause localized flooding, but will maintain or improve wetland conditions throughout the main breeding areas. This, coupled with favourable cover, will translate into great renesting efforts and ideal brood-rearing conditions. Given all of these factors, Manitoba is expected to have an above average year for waterfowl production.

Eastern Region

ONTARIO

As the hatch gets underway, habitat conditions are generally good across southern Ontario, even though the amount of rainfall in the region has been highly variable. May precipitation was highest in the southwest (115 to 200 % of the monthly average), normal



in south central areas, and lowest in the southeast (40 to 85 % of monthly average). Despite these differences in rainfall, most permanent wetlands in the southern region remain sufficiently flooded to provide quality brood-rearing habitat. Average May temperatures were 2 to 3 C above normal, and this warming trend has emergent plant phenology and insect hatches well advanced for this time of year. However, haying operations are also ahead of schedule and this will likely impact the success of re-nesting hens. Water levels in all of the Great Lakes remain below their respective long-term averages; and although levels are expected to increase in three of the five lakes by the end of June, these changes will be minor.



Permanent wetland in south-eastern Ontario - early June

Conditions remain drier than normal across most of northern Ontario, although the Lake of the Woods area (by the Manitoba border) has received more than twice its normal monthly rainfall. Although water levels in many northern lakes are down significantly, habitats remain satisfactory for breeding waterfowl. Mean temperatures have also been warmer than normal across the north, including the Hudson Bay Lowlands, where Southern James Bay and Mississippi Valley populations of Canada geese got a very early start to the breeding season.

USFWS/CWS Survey results suggest that waterfowl pair numbers are up in some parts of the province, including the southeast where good numbers of wood ducks are being reported. Mallard broods have been sighted throughout southern Ontario since early May, confirming that birds capitalized on the early spring-like weather and that many of these initial nesting attempts have been successful. Early results from the black duck survey of central and northeast Ontario are also encouraging, while a strong breeding effort is being reported for Southern James Bay and Mississippi Valley populations of Canada geese, which is a welcome change from last year. Overall, waterfowl production for 2010 is projected to be slightly above average for Ontario.

QUÉBEC



Bank of the St. Lawrence River, at St. Louis Lake – Early June

May temperatures were warmer than normal across the province, and monthly averages ranging from 1 to 2.7 C. It was also a relatively dry month, with almost 50% less precipitation than normal falling in western and southern areas, although amounts were closer to normal in Saguenay and in the east. Over the past week, almost 40 forest fires have been raging in the Boreal Forest of Quebec. The area between Quebec City and Ottawa was covered in a dense smoky fog on May 31 due to these fires.



Water levels in all of the Ottawa River valley and the St. Lawrence River are below their respective levels for this time of the year. Presently, temporary and semi-permanent wetlands are also dry throughout the province.

Waterfowl breeding is well underway and many broods are being observed along the St. Lawrence River, especially in lower regions. In the Montreal archipelago, many broods of Canada geese, mallards and wood ducks have been reported. Generally, waterfowl pair numbers are normal and production should be good despite the low water levels. Overall, habitat conditions remain fair, but significant additional moisture is required to ensure availability of good brood-rearing habitats.

ATLANTIC CANADA

Unseasonably warm weather continues in Atlantic Canada, with some daytime temperatures nearing 30 C. Precipitation has been below normal, resulting in drier than normal conditions. Some rivers are already at their midsummer heights, and several wetlands are operating below their normal operating levels, many of which are dependent on precipitation recharge alone.



The warmer temperatures seemed to result in an earlier migration and nest initiation, and likely increased brood survival. Many large broods can be observed, at higher than normal densities. Several of these broods are already in the 2A class, which indicates that nesting was earlier than usual. Broods of mallards, black ducks, goldeneyes, wigeons and Canada geese have been observed, and all other species are paired and nesting.

There is some concern that low water levels in many areas may result in a substantial drop below normal operating levels this summer. However, this seasonal water fluctuation is natural on a floodplain system and will likely have no influence on brood rearing. Many hens move their older broods to larger brooding-rearing areas that are less likely to be affected by lower water levels. In fact, reduced water levels may act to concentrate invertebrates in more accessible shallow areas, which could make feeding easier for ducklings.



The early appearance of numerous, high density waterfowl broods indicates that this will be a great recruitment year. A greater local breeding effort is being reported this year, and favourable spring conditions may have lured some migrants to stop short of their traditional northern migration. Overall, habitat conditions for Atlantic Canada are good.

Salisbury, NB – Early June