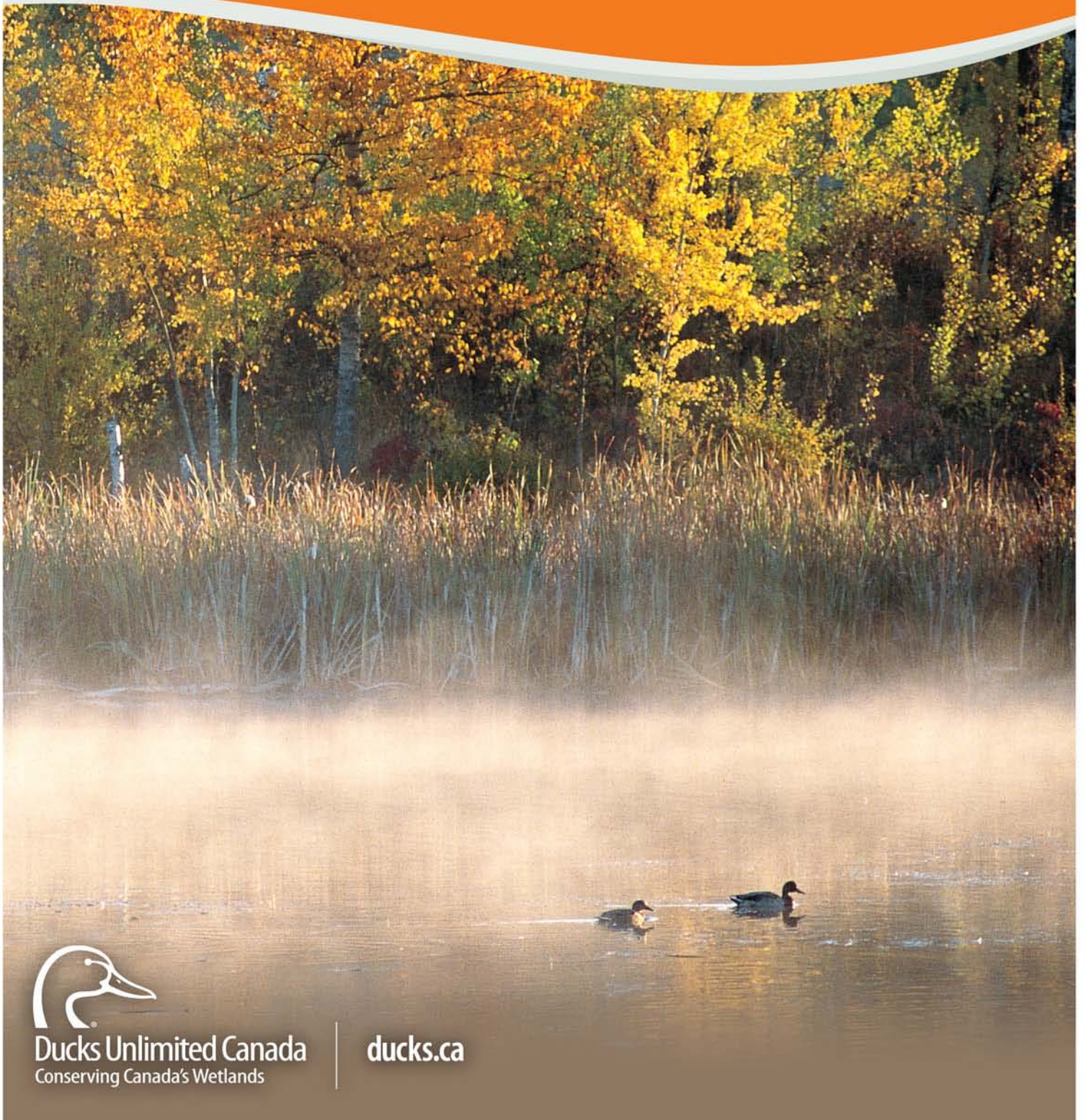


Habitat Report

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Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

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Habitat Report Contributors

Editor:

Meagan Hainstock

Field Reporters:

British Columbia
Bruce Harrison

Western Boreal Forest
Brent Friedt

Alberta
Ian McFarlane

Saskatchewan
Michael Hill

Manitoba
Mark Francis

Ontario
Erling Armson

Québec
Patrick Harbour

Atlantic Canada
Adam Campbell

Habitat Reports Online

In English:

ducks.ca/habitatconditions

In French:

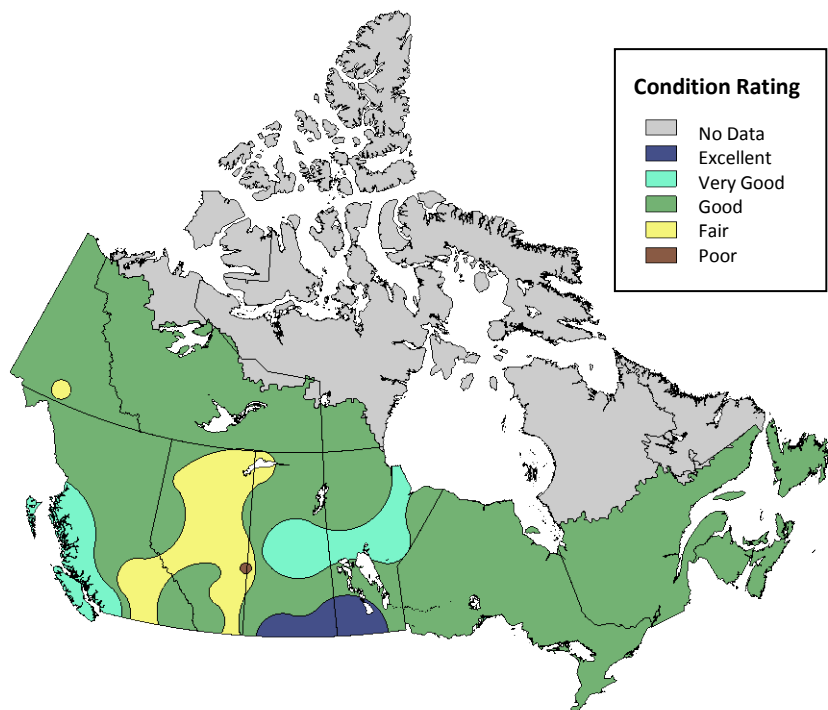
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The following is a compilation of impressions, collected from Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) field staff, of environmental conditions relative to breeding waterfowl. These observations are not based on systematic surveys, and are not intended to describe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

Fall Habitat Conditions in Canada

Summary

It has been a relatively long, warm autumn in Canada. Wintering birds are arriving in British Columbia as the fall migration tails off in the Western Boreal Forest. Prospects for the frost seal vary in Alberta, but good nesting cover conditions are predicted for next spring. A good frost seal is anticipated in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where migrants are being pushed southward by cold fronts and snow. Ontario and Québec are welcoming higher-than-normal numbers of wigeons and snow geese, respectively, and wood duck prevalence is high in Atlantic Canada.



British Columbia / Western Boreal Forest

BRITISH COLUMBIA

October precipitation was mixed along the coast, and heavy autumn rains have yet to arrive as of early November. Temperatures have been dropping, and higher mountains have a dusting of snow. Many winter cover crops have been planted, and remnant vegetable crops such as potatoes will provide good feeding sites. These fields are important sources of energy and nutrients for migrating and wintering waterfowl.



Coastal region wetland levels are normal for this time of year, and many waterfowl can be seen along these freshwater and tidal wetlands as they stopover on their migration southward. Wintering birds are also arriving along the south coast, including thousands of snow geese that will reside around the Fraser Delta and Puget Sound for the winter months.



Migrants in the central Interior

Fall weather was generally warm and dry in the central Interior, where precipitation was roughly half of normal. The frost seal will likely be fair at best, although current habitat conditions are still good. The fall flight is now tailing off, and was slightly below normal to normal overall.

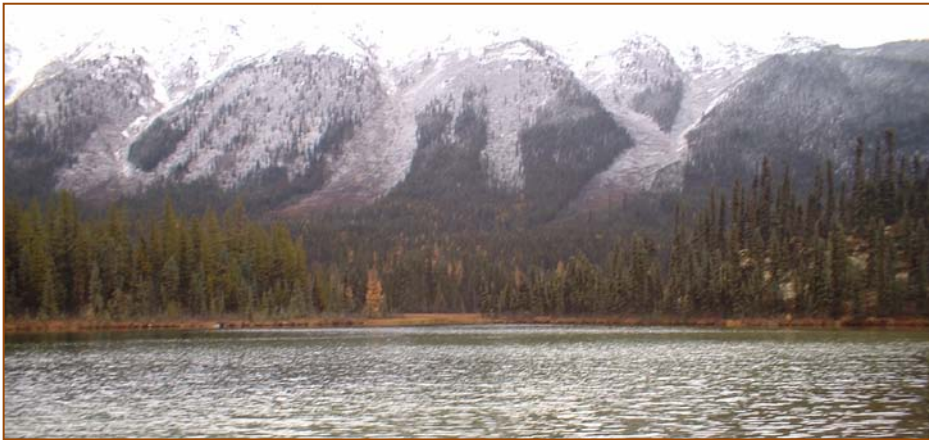
In the southern Interior, fall weather was warm and dry, but has recently returned to seasonal norms. The frost seal may be fair. Wetland conditions are slightly drier than the long-term average, although uplands are relatively healthy. Wetlands are in good shape in the southeast Interior, where fall weather was warm but moisture was about normal.

Fall precipitation was low (40-60 per cent of normal since September 1) in the Peace region, but overall growing-season precipitation was average due to heavy rainfall events in June and July. There is no snow on the ground, and surface soil conditions are very dry, making for a poor frost seal forecast.

Peace region wetlands levels are still good, and upland cover conditions are very good. Crop depredation by waterfowl has been low, and was not concentrated in any particular area this fall. Although harvest was protracted this year, crops (other than canola) were never laying in swath for lengthy periods of time, which reduced feeding opportunities. Temperatures dropped by nearly 30 C over three days in early November. Major lakes have frozen over, and only a few birds remain. The fall flight is essentially over.

WESTERN BOREAL FOREST

Migration progressed as it usually does in the Yukon. Swans passed through Whitehorse in mid October, and the late-September sandhill crane migration through southeast Yukon was impressive as always. Although most birds are gone now, there are always a few stragglers. Temperatures have been dropping to -10 C in a number of places somewhat regularly. One of the last areas to welcome winter was Whitehorse, where September was a little cooler than normal but October had several weeks of 2 C. Snow is on the ground in many places, though not much. Small ponds around Whitehorse are frozen over, while larger basins are probably a few weeks away from freezing.



North of Watson Bay, Yukon

River had 7.4 mm, compared to its norm of 24.3 mm. Fort Simpson received just over 24 mm for October, half of which fell in one day.

Fall moved into northern Saskatchewan slowly and calmly, with above-normal to normal temperatures. Ice has begun to form over most small wetlands, and many birds have moved completely through the area now. There are still groups of snow geese around, and some hunters are still shooting ducks, but large numbers have already moved through. Snow is in the forecast, and winter appears to be just around the corner.

In The Pas area of northern Manitoba, above-average temperatures remained through much of September and October, and all water bodies remain open as of early November. Large numbers of geese (Canada and snow) moved through from northern regions in mid September and early October. Field hunters reported shooting a great diversity and abundance of waterfowl this fall, and above-average hunts were reported consistently. Over-water hunters also reported consistently limiting out. Large numbers of divers (mainly scaup and ring-necked duck) are still passing through areas with open water, as are green-winged teal and mallards in the farming region of the Carrot River Valley. North of The Pas, in Cranberry Portage, temperatures have been above normal this fall, and freeze-up has yet to happen. Some small ponds are starting to skim over with overnight freezing.

In the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife has had well-above-normal precipitation. Over 50 mm fell in October, which usually receives an average of 35 mm. Norman Wells has had slightly below-average precipitation.

Much of northern Alberta received little precipitation in October. Edmonton received 8.8 mm of rainfall, which is less than half of its normal amount. Further north, High Level had 12.2 mm, which is also less than half of normal. Peace

Prairie Canada

ALBERTA



In the agricultural area of the province, warm and dry conditions have prevailed through the fall. Since September 1, precipitation totals have been less than 60 per cent of normal from the southern Prairie to the Peace Parkland. September temperatures were 2-5 C above normal, and similar conditions continued through much of October. Prospects for a good frost seal have diminished as a result of the dry conditions and in spite of the very wet spring and summer. Many municipalities have total fire bans in place.

Wetlands started to freeze in late October as overnight temperatures consistently dipped below 0 C. Open water persists in larger and deeper wetlands. Recently, temperatures dipped to seasonal or below-normal levels, and the first significant snow has fallen in southern Alberta.

In the Prairie, wetland water levels have declined. While some ponds that were anticipated to last until freeze-up have now gone dry, many wetlands that are typically dry in late fall are still retaining water. An early-October storm brought 60-100 mm of rain to the southwest corner of the Prairie, where frost seal prospects are good. However, the general lack of fall precipitation has depleted surface soil moisture elsewhere in the Prairie, where prospects for a frost seal are fair.

In the Aspen Parkland, wetland conditions are good in the southwest landscapes of Buffalo Lake and Pine Lake, where many semi-permanent wetlands remain full. In the eastern and northern landscapes of Sullivan Lake, Viking Moraine and Cooking Lake, semi-permanent wetlands have exposed mudflats. Conditions in the



Class IV wetland in Buffalo Lake area

Wainwright-Provost area are poor. Frost seal prospects are good in the southwest, fair in central and northeast areas, and poor in the southeast.

Frost seal prospects are fair in the Boreal Transition Zone (BTZ) and Peace Parkland, although semi-permanent and permanent wetlands are in good condition in the Peace Parkland, where overnight temperatures were recently close to -20 C.

The protracted warm, dry fall allowed farmers to complete their harvest with minimal delay. In spite of recent dry conditions, Agriculture and Agri-Food

Canada reports no shortages of forage supply or on-farm surface water supply. There was good re-growth in hay fields, and pasture conditions remain fair to good. There will be good nesting cover available for returning waterfowl next spring. However, without widespread soil moisture recharge in the next month, frost seal prospects are generally fair.

The prolonged fall also extended the fall migration. With wetlands remaining ice free, good numbers of birds have been observed on large and small wetlands across the landscape into early November. Recent cold and snow will force some birds south and onto larger ice-free wetlands. Daytime temperatures are forecast to rebound across the province, to above 0 C in mid November.

SASKATCHEWAN

From April to September, rainfall was well above normal. The Missouri Coteau and southeast areas were particularly wet, with over 500 mm of accumulated precipitation. East-central and north-central areas have also been very wet, with over 350 mm of accumulated precipitation. Since September 1, temperatures have been above normal and there has been little to no rainfall.



Seasonal and temporary wetlands that were present in August have now mostly dried up, but semi-permanent and permanent wetlands still have good to excellent water conditions. Although soil is beginning to dry, most areas should have a good frost seal thanks to wet summer conditions.



Southeast of Dinsmore

The province had its first snowstorm, which produced >75 mm of snow, on November 5 and 6. Temperatures are now dipping below 0 C, which will cause most wetlands to freeze with some possible thawing during the day.

There are still a number of Canada geese and mallards remaining, along the major rivers where they can find open water and on larger bodies of water that are not frozen. The recent snowstorm should push some of them south. Hunting activity has dropped off significantly with the freezing temperatures and snow.

The dry fall produced near ideal conditions for producers to harvest their crops, the yield and quality of which are some of the best in many years. Unfortunately, the prolonged fall also created an opportunity for new wetland drainage, which appears to be increasing, especially as grain prices remain high. There are also reports of native prairie being lost. Wetland and native prairie loss continues to be a significant cause for concern in Saskatchewan.

MANITOBA

Wetland conditions remain favourable despite the continuation of dry conditions from the summer into the fall. Rainfall has been well below average since the spring, but larger semi-permanent wetland basins remain flooded to the vegetated edge thanks to an extremely wet spring. However, shallower Class III basins are now becoming dry, especially in the Killarney landscape. The Minnedosa/Shoal Lake Pothole region remains somewhat wetter than Killarney, as do parts of the Virden landscape.



Although temperatures were above average for the month of October, a recent cold front has seen all but the largest of basins freeze over. This front was also responsible for dumping roughly 3 cm of snow throughout much of the southwest breeding range.

Although surface soil conditions are very dry, soil beyond the immediate surface level remains favourably moist, except in eastern portions of the Killarney landscape.

Migration has been slow and steady. Only moderate concentrations of birds have been observed compared to previous years. Migrants seem to be continuously trickling through, resulting in shallow peaks and valleys of numbers. This is largely due to the availability of food, which was deficient due to the lack of seeded acres and the success of harvest. This was very evident in some areas, where traditional fall staging areas were nearly void of birds. A mid-October cold front saw large numbers of waterfowl move through the area, and a lot of traditional waterfowling areas never recovered from this mass exodus.

Wetland conditions remain excellent through much of the breeding area, except in the extreme south, which is in very good condition. Soil moisture conditions are not ideal but may provide for an adequate frost seal. These conditions will be maintained if winter snow accumulations are average.



Near Neelin

Eastern Region

ONTARIO

Despite lower-than-normal precipitation in late summer, October rainfall has replenished wetlands in northern Ontario. Southern Ontario basins have also been topped up by recent rainfall, after average late-summer and early-fall precipitation.



Black duck hen near Algonquin Park

Water levels in the Upper Great Lakes (Superior and Michigan) are somewhat below the long-term average, but this has not had an impact on coastal wetland staging habitats. Water levels through the Lower Great Lakes (St. Clair, Erie and Ontario) are above average, especially on Lake Erie, which is 30 cm above the norm.

So far, the fall has been fairly warm. Throughout the interior of the province, temperatures have not been cold enough to freeze significant numbers of wetlands. As a result, large numbers of waterfowl are still present in traditional inland areas. Canada goose and mallard

numbers are high in semi-urban and agricultural areas along the coast. Late-maturing corn, coupled with recent wet weather, has provided ample field-feeding opportunities for dabblers.

Diving ducks, including scaups, redheads and canvasbacks, have been present along traditional areas of the lower Great Lakes since mid October. Another wave of divers and late-season birds will likely be pushed down from the northwest once temperatures and weather fronts are more pronounced. Anecdotally, many people have noted higher-than-normal numbers of wigeons. No sightings of tundra swans have been reported to date.

Overall, fall migratory habitat is in good shape. Soil moisture is currently average to above average, and conditions are expected to be very good going into freeze-up.

QUÉBEC

Fall temperatures were particularly warm; 2-3 C higher than usual in many areas. September was the second and third warmest on record in Eastern Townships and Québec City areas, respectively.

September was somewhat dry, except in the Eastern Townships, which recorded 31 per cent more rainfall than normal. A tornado affected a small area in central Québec on September 4, bringing 120-130 km/hr winds. In October, total monthly precipitation was generally close to or slightly below normal.

The St. Lawrence water level has decreased with the lack of fall rain and is now close to normal.

As expected, the fall flight was normal this year. In the St. Lawrence Gulf, many flocks of male common eiders were observed. Hunting season results have generally been good. Habitat conditions remain good throughout province, and are very good in the Ottawa River valley and along the St. Lawrence River plain.



Snow geese in Baie-du-Febvre

At Cap Tourmente National Wildlife area, 2011 greater snow goose surveys revealed peak abundance on October 4, with 54,000 geese counted, which is lower than 2010 (66,500 geese) but higher than 2009 (48,000 geese) and 2008 (46,000 geese).

ATLANTIC CANADA

It has been an average fall season, with some larger rain events and many clear, sunny days. Wetlands are at normal operating levels. Daytime temperatures have been consistently above the long-term average, while



evening temperatures have dipped below 0 C. Lately, frosty mornings have been followed by daytime temperatures in the teens. It will likely be some time before freeze-up settles in.



Near Germantown, New Brunswick

Fewer waterfowl are being observed, likely because reproductive success was lower than normal this breeding season. However, wood duck prevalence seems to suggest they had a successful breeding season. Many waterfowlers reported poor success on opening day, and a few hunting parties were unsuccessful. Early hunting pressure has pushed some local birds south, and it has been relatively quiet for a few weeks. Few to no blue winged teal are still present.

A wave of migrants has recently arrived, with several large flights of black ducks making appearances. Parts of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are inundated with large flocks of Canada geese.

Waterfowl habitat is ideal, thanks to summer rainfall and the persistence of open water areas. Northern waterfowl migration is starting to pick up, and many local waterfowl have moved south already. Overall, habitat conditions are good in the Atlantic Region.