



DUCK PRODUCTION 2025 STATUS UPDATE



Delta Waterfowl Programs Produce More Ducks

Predator Management and Hen Houses boost every fall flight

Ducks and duck hunters are resilient. And that's especially important when dry conditions persist across a large swath of the prairie pothole region, a key breeding area for the continent's duck production.

We won't sugarcoat it: The 2025-2026 duck season might not be marked with the most ducks you've ever seen from the shooting window of your duck blind. But rest assured, there will be a migration, whistling wings overhead, spent powder, wet retrievers, and buddies enjoying great moments together dressed in waders and camo.

While Delta Waterfowl can't make it snow in the winter or rain in the spring on

the breeding grounds, we are working every day of the year to produce ducks and ensure the best possible days in the marsh for duck hunters.

Whether it's a wet year — and we sure could use one — or a dry spring, Delta's proven Duck Production programs put more birds into every fall flight. Your support of Delta's Predator Management and Hen House programs is a critical investment in waterfowl conservation and better hunting seasons.

Fall Flight Outlook

The 2025 Waterfowl Population Status report released Sept. 2 by the U.S.



DELTA HAD A PROGRAM
RECORD **14,325** HEN
HOUSES WAITING FOR
NESTING DUCKS TO
RETURN TO THE BREEDING
GROUNDS IN **SPRING 2025.**

Fish and Wildlife Service revealed a breeding population index of 33.98 million ducks in the Traditional Survey Area, slightly below the 2024 index of 33.99 million ducks. The 2025 breeding duck population estimate is 4% below the long-term average for the survey that's been conducted annually since 1955.

When ducks returned to the prairies this spring, they encountered dry conditions. May pond counts, a key



indicator of breeding habitat conditions and potential production, declined 19% from the previous spring. Pond counts in the North-Central United States — which includes Montana and the Dakotas — dropped 34%, while the prairie and parklands regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba were down 5% from 2024. The 2025 May ponds estimate of 4.18 million is 20% lower than the long-term average.

The Waterfowl Breeding Population and Habitat Survey showed that far fewer ducks than average settled in the prairie pothole region to breed this spring, which coupled with fewer wetlands, likely means a below-average year for duck production.

The survey estimated the breeding population at 6.55 mallards, a 1% decrease from 2024, but 17% below the long-term average. More mallards settled in Canadian prairies this spring, but still far below average.

Among puddle duck species, gadwalls increased 6%, wigeon were up 9%, shovelers rose 4%, and pintails jumped 13%. As a result of a change in harvest models supported by Delta Waterfowl, hunters throughout most of the United States are allowed to shoot three pintails daily this season.

Blue-winged teal dropped 4% to 4.32 million, the lowest level since 2004. Notably, bluewings were down 18% in the Eastern Dakotas, where more than a third of the population breeds during a typical year. Several consecutive dry springs across key nesting areas in the Dakotas and

Saskatchewan have hurt production.

Green-winged teal decreased 15% to 2.55 million, but their population remains 16% above the long-term average.

Among diving duck species,



**THE GOAL OF DELTA'S
MDC IS TO PRODUCE
A MILLION DUCKS,
EVERY YEAR,
FOREVER.**

canvasbacks and redheads increased, while scaup populations dropped 10% to 3.68 million. Canvasbacks are estimated at 690,200, the most since 2017. Redheads, which breed primarily in the same semi-permanent wetland habitat as canvasbacks, jumped 17% to 918,200.

Results for the Eastern Survey Area, ducks that migrate down the Atlantic Flyway, show 1.14 million

mallards, essentially no change from 2024. Black ducks are down 6% but remain 11% above the long-term average. Ring-necked ducks were estimated at 756,000, a 9% increase, while green-winged teal were down 24% to 342,000. Goldeneyes also declined by 25%, while mergansers increased 1%. Wood ducks in the Atlantic Flyway are estimated at 900,000, similar to the long-term average. Habitat conditions in the Eastern Survey Area were deemed good to excellent, so duck production should be strong.

In the Pacific Flyway, the California breeding survey showed a 49% increase for mallards, while Oregon's index showed a 12% increase. Mallards were down 11% in Washington. Pintail breeding populations were up 30% in the Alaska Yukon Territory Old Crow Flats region, and 36% in the Central-Northern Alberta/Northeast British Columbia/Northwest Territory region. Combined, 1.45 million pintails—two-thirds of the continental population—settled in far northwest breeding areas this spring. Similarly, wigeon increased



**PREDATOR CONTROL
RESTORES BALANCE, HELPING
DUCKS HATCH SUCCESSFULLY.**

in both regions, with more than 75% of North America's population of 3.19 million breeding there. Habitat

conditions were generally good across those areas, so decent duck production should result in a better fall flight out west.

Maximizing Duck Production

Although nesting conditions across the key breeding grounds were less than optimal this spring, Delta's scientifically proven Duck Production programs will add more ducks to the 2025 fall flight. Led by Joel Brice, Delta's chief conservation officer, the team adds Hen House nesting structures every winter and operates Predator Management sites across the prairie each spring to increase the number of ducks migrating through every flyway.

During the winter of 2024-2025, Delta Hen House specialists added 2,100 nest structures, including 850 in Saskatchewan, 500 in Manitoba, 400 in Alberta, 200 in South Dakota, and 150 in North Dakota. In total, Delta had a program-record 14,325 Hen Houses waiting for nesting ducks to return to the breeding grounds in spring 2025.

Used primarily by mallards, Hen Houses are proven to increase nest

success dramatically — up to 12 times higher than a hen nesting in the nearby grass. Delta installs these nesting cylinders lined with flax straw and mounted on poles over shallow, semi-permanent wetlands to keep hens and their eggs safely out of reach of most mammalian predators.

Matt Chouinard, waterfowl programs director, said Delta anticipates adding another 2,200 nest structures in winter 2026. Plans call for 700 new Hen Houses in Manitoba, 600 in Saskatchewan, 400 in Alberta, and 500 in North Dakota.

To increase the efficiency of Hen House delivery, Delta set up a distribution and storage facility near Young, Saskatchewan, in the heart of the PPR. The new facility provides a central location for Hen House contractors working in the Canadian prairies and parklands to pick up materials for new installations.

When Delta's Hen House program reaches full maturity, the long-term goal is to have 109,647 nesting structures deployed, which would add 250,000 fledged mallards to every fall flight.

Delta's Predator Management expanded to a record 50 sites in 2025, marking a second consecutive nesting season of operating in all five primary Duck Production jurisdictions of the PPR.

From March 15 to July 15, Delta-contracted trappers worked to reduce duck-nest predator populations on key breeding sites in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Managing key mammalian nest predators such as raccoons and skunks in areas with high densities of breeding ducks (>60 pairs per square mile) but with a low percentage of grassland nesting cover can dramatically boost nest success. Delta's Predator Management restores a more equitable predator/prey balance and allows ducks to successfully hatch nests and raise broods on the prairie landscape.

According to Mike Buxton, waterfowl programs director, trappers in the Dakotas had good access to wetland habitat beginning in mid-March because less snow covered the landscape. Trappers found similar conditions

DELTA PILLAR: DUCK PRODUCTION

Nest success — hens hatching their eggs — is the primary driver of duck populations in North America. In general, 15% to 20% of nests need to hatch just to maintain the population level.

On many areas of the prairie breeding grounds, nest predators such as raccoons, skunks, and a host of other mammalian predators are overly abundant. As a result, nest success is poor, often less than 5%, or even worse. During more than three decades of innovative research, Delta Waterfowl has tested and refined solutions to cost-effectively produce ducks. Delta's proven duck production programs — Hen Houses and Predator Management — significantly boost nest success. Delta maximizes the impact of our duck production work by removing predators

and installing nest structures in areas where ducks breed in high numbers, but where nest success is low because of heavy predation and a lack of nesting cover.

Predator Management and Hen Houses are the perfect complement to dollars spent to conserve wetlands and nesting cover on the breeding grounds. These Delta programs are the best available tools to restore a reasonable predator/prey balance and assist quality wetlands and grasslands to increase duck production.

Predator Management and Hen Houses are proven tools to add ducks to every fall flight for the benefit of hunters. We're fulfilling the promise of our mission as The Duck Hunters Organization™ to produce ducks and ensure the future of waterfowl hunting.

in Alberta, whereas operators in Saskatchewan and Manitoba had a slower start because of heavier snowpack. More snow certainly benefits nesting ducks because it recharges wetlands.

The number of predators Delta trappers caught was average in the Dakotas, but below average in Saskatchewan, likely because the prolonged drought in the province. Dry cycles negatively affect duck populations, and take a toll on other animals, too.

The most important factor in Predator Management success is how fast trappers can catch those duck nest predators. We're most effective when we remove predators as early as possible in the duck nesting season, before they've had a chance to raid nests, eat the eggs, and kill nesting hens.

Delta's Predator Management program was highly effective in 2025. Delta's efforts produced ducks across the PPR — thousands of mallards,

pintails, gadwalls, teal, and other species that will be migrating south this fall.

Delta plans to operate 50 sites across the five key jurisdictions again next spring to produce ducks for duck hunters. Ultimately, Delta's goal is to operate 327 Predator Management sites across the PPR and Canadian parklands to produce 750,000 ducks each year.

Increasing Our Impact

Delta's leaders recognize the only way to increase duck production — to fill our skies with waterfowl. In 2022, we launched the Million Duck Campaign, a bold, unprecedented effort to build an endowment fund to dramatically increase the number of ducks hatching every year on the prairie. The goal of Delta's MDC is to produce a million ducks, every year, forever.

In July, Delta CEO Jason Tharpe announced MDC has secured more than \$284 million in gifts and pledges

to fund the organization's future Duck Production program work to send a million more ducks south every fall.

Delta's program leaders and staff have been ramping up to deliver on the promise of MDC, anticipating the moment the endowment becomes fully funded.

We're training more Predator Management trappers and Hen House technicians, employing new technology to deliver both programs efficiently at larger scales, and preparing to maximize duck production as the MDC endowment builds. Delta's staff has never been more energized and excited to achieve such a monumental goal for the ducks and duck hunters of North America.

Our success in producing more ducks is a direct result of our partnership with you — our valued members, volunteers and donors. Together, we're The Duck Hunters Organization™.

Thank you for your continued support. Have a great season!



The Duck Hunters Organization™
www.deltawaterfowl.org