



2026 DUCK PRODUCTION STATUS UPDATE



Delta Waterfowl Programs Strengthen the Fall Flight

Hen Houses and Predator Management produce more ducks every year

Duck hunters are accustomed to challenges. From early mornings trudging through muck to enduring blistering north winds, we brave a gamut of elements every year in pursuit of ducks. It's part of what makes a successful duck hunt so rewarding.

The 2026-27 duck season will present its own set of challenges as duck hunters contend with the impacts of continued dry conditions across key parts of the breeding grounds. Delta staff spent the winter, spring, and summer working across the breeding grounds to produce ducks and ensure the best possible days for hunters. Delta's Hen House and Predator Management programs maximize the prairies — whether they're wet or

dry — to strengthen the fall flight on behalf of you, the duck hunter.

By supporting Delta's Hen House and Predator Management efforts, you're investing in innovative science and proven solutions to produce ducks, leading to stronger fall flights and more ducks over your decoys every year.

Fall Flight Outlook

The 2026 Waterfowl Population Status report released Sept. 1 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service showed a breeding population index of 33.44 million ducks in the Traditional Survey Area. The 2026 breeding duck population declined 2% from last year and is 6% below the long-term average in the annual Waterfowl Breeding Population and



Delta had a program record **16,525** Hen Houses waiting for nesting ducks to return to the breeding grounds in **Spring 2026**.

Habitat Survey dating back to 1955.

When ducks returned to the prairie breeding grounds this spring, they encountered wetter conditions throughout the Canadian prairie provinces while much of the U.S. prairies remained dry. The survey's May pond count, a key indicator of breeding habitat conditions and potential production, showed 4.76 million ponds, a 14% increase over spring 2025. Canada was 29% wetter, while U.S. wetlands were down 10%. Overall, the pond count was 9% below the LTA.

Even with the habitat improvements in Canada this year, due to drier conditions in May across much of the Dakotas — a region that produces millions of ducks each year — duck production was likely average, but improved in many areas over recent years.

The survey estimated the breeding population of mallards at 5.86 million, an 11% decrease from last year that's also 26% below the LTA. The mallard breeding population estimate is the lowest since 1993.

Among the seven species of puddle ducks listed in the Traditional Survey Area results, only shovelers increased, jumping 19% to 3.29 million. Gadwalls decreased 3%, and wigeon and green-winged teal both declined 8%. Even with decreases this spring, gadwalls, wigeon, and green-winged teal all remain above the LTA.

Pintails declined 11%, dropping to 1.99 million, which marks the third time in the past five years the breeding population has dipped below 2 million. The 2026 estimate puts pintails 48% below the LTA. Blue-winged teal declined 11% and, like mallards, are now at the lowest breeding population

estimate since 1993.

The bright spot in this year's report is diving ducks, all of which have increased. Canvasbacks are estimated at 782,000, a 13% jump. Scaup, also



IN 2027, DELTA'S DUCK PRODUCTION EFFORTS ARE PROJECTED TO ADD 200,000 DUCKS TO THE FALL FLIGHT

known as bluebills, moved up to 4.16 million, a notable 13% increase over last year. Redheads climbed to 931,000, a 1% increase.

Results for the Eastern Survey Area were similar to 2025. At 890,000, mallard populations declined 2%, although the population is 23% below the LTA. Black ducks decreased 6% to 739,000, while green-winged teal also declined 6% to 320,000. Continuing the theme of positive news on diving ducks, ring-necked ducks jumped 9% to 829,000. Goldeneyes declined 7% to 668,000, while mergansers increased 6% to 680,000. Wood ducks in the Atlantic Flyway are estimated at 900,000, similar to the LTA. Habitat conditions in the

Eastern Survey Area ranged from fair to good to excellent, so duck production should be average to strong.

In the Pacific Flyway, the California breeding survey showed a 1% decline for mallards and a 5% decline in Oregon, while Washington's index revealed an 8% increase. Pintail breeding populations were up 4% in the Central-Northern Alberta/Northeast British Columbia/Northwest Territory region but saw a decline of 37% in the Alaska Yukon Territory Old Crow Flats region. Habitat conditions were generally dry or in drought status on the West Coast, except for Alaska, where duck production was expected to be strong.

Habitat conditions in portions of the Great Lakes region improved from 2025, notably in Michigan, where wetlands increased 40% this year, and state officials estimated 505,000 ducks, a 250% increase over 2025. Mallards increased 61% in Michigan, 47% in Minnesota, and 5% in Wisconsin. Blue-winged teal increased 19% in Wisconsin and 220% in Minnesota. Overall, duck production in the Great Lakes region should be good to excellent.

DELTA PILLAR: DUCK PRODUCTION

Nest success 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 pro-

grams 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.



Producing More Ducks

Delta Waterfowl's Duck Production team operates across the Canadian and U.S. prairies, installing Hen House nesting structures every winter and running Predator Management sites each spring and summer. Delta produces ducks that migrate through every flyway.

During the 2026 duck nesting season, Delta's Hen Houses and Predator Management efforts added 170,000 ducks to the fall flight.

During the winter of 2025-2026, Delta Hen House contractors added 2,200 Hen Houses in key breeding grounds, including 700 new nest structures in Manitoba, 600 in Saskatchewan, 500 in North Dakota, and 400 in Alberta. Delta currently has 16,525 Hen Houses in service.

Hen Houses are cylindrical nesting structures lined with flax straw and mounted on poles over semi-permanent wetlands. Used primarily by mallards, the structures are placed strategically in areas of the breeding grounds that attract high densities of nesting hens, but where grassland nesting cover is scarce. Hen Houses keep ducks and their eggs safely out of reach of most mammalian predators. Nest success is up to 12 times higher in a Hen House than for a hen that nests in nearby ground cover.

Delta plans to add 3,025 nest structures this winter. At full maturity, Delta will have 109,647 Hen Houses deployed, adding 250,000 fledged mallards to every fall flight.

During the 2026 duck nesting season, Delta operated 51 Predator Management sites on key breeding sites in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Delta contracted trappers were afield from March 15 to July 15, reducing duck nest predators such as raccoons and skunks. Delta concentrates on areas with high densities of breeding ducks but where nest success, defined as a nest with at least one hatched duckling, is low.

Delta's program restores the predator/



WETTER HABITAT CONDITIONS BENEFITS BROOD SURVIVAL

The 33.4 million breeding ducks that were counted in the 2026 annual survey are not the total population of ducks in the fall flight. The survey, which is flown in May, does not account for the millions of juvenile birds produced by this year's nesting hens, which is why habitat conditions in the prairie pothole region are so important during spring and early summer.

Despite the 29% increase in pond counts in Canada, due to a 10% decrease in pond counts in the U.S. prairies and fair conditions that persisted this spring across the Dakotas, duck production overall has likely been average.

Rain eventually filled wetlands in the U.S. prairies, mostly across northern North Dakota, but not until after many ducks had begun to nest. The wetter conditions were still beneficial, increasing brood survival and offering improved renesting opportunities. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual survey conducted in July showed a 55% increase in broods from the previous year.

The northern tier of Alberta and Saskatchewan benefited from persistent precipitation, allowing ample renesting opportunities in wetlands stretching from Edmonton to the Saskatchewan border. Areas of southwestern Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan that were dry last year have improved due to consistent precipitation, which provided good brood survival and renesting efforts.

Although up to 70% of ducks harvested originate in the PPR, broods are raised across the continent. In the East, duck production ranged from fair to good, while the West Coast continued to experience drought conditions that likely dampened duck production. Officials in Michigan reported that wet conditions led to a 250% increase in breeding waterfowl, with Wisconsin and Minnesota also reporting wet springs and increases in breeding ducks.



prey balance to increase nest success. In many parts of the breeding grounds, nest success can drop below 10%, while a hatch rate of 15% to 20% is required just to maintain local populations. Trapping can increase nest success dramatically.

Delta's trappers began work in mid-March, weeks before ducks returned and wetlands thawed. Trapping is the most effective when predators are removed before they have a chance to raid nests, eat eggs, and kill nesting hens.

Trappers in the Dakotas had good access to wetland habitat in mid-March as most areas had sparse snow cover, while in prairie Canada, snow lingered well into spring. Rain was the common theme on both sides of the border as summer progressed, with strong storms inundating wetlands and causing localized flooding. Trappers in impacted areas adjusted to regional rain abundance. Overall, it was a successful year of trapping across the prairies.

Delta plans to expand Predator Management efforts to 58 sites across the Canadian and U.S. prairies next spring. Delta's goal is to operate 327 Predator Management sites across the PPR and Canadian parklands to produce 750,000 ducks every year in perpetuity.

In 2027, Delta's Hen Houses and Predator Management efforts are projected to add 200,000 ducks to the fall flight.

Scaling Up Duck Production

Every year, Delta expands its Duck Production efforts across the breeding grounds. The growth of these programs is supported by the success of the Million Duck Campaign, an unprecedented effort to build an endowment fund to support

nization's inaugural trapper training program, a comprehensive course designed for interested trappers to learn about Predator Management. Over two days in April in North Dakota, nine trapper candidates participated in classroom discussions and hands-on field demonstrations that touched on essentials such as best practices, safety, equipment, tactics, and lures. After attending the course, the participants spent time afield with a member of Delta's trapping team to gain eligibility for a contract in 2027.

The ability to identify prospective trappers and train them well in advance provides Delta with a solid growth trajectory to expand the impact of Predator Management each year.

As The Duck Hunters Organization™, Delta's pledge to duck hunters across North America is to send 1 million more ducks south every fall — and we're working harder every year to achieve that goal. Reaching that milestone will only be possible with the support of our members, volunteers, and donors. Together, we're building a bright future for duck hunting in North America, one defined by stronger fall flights and memorable moments spent in the duck blind with your family and friends.

We appreciate your continued trust in Delta Waterfowl to ensure the future of waterfowl hunting in North America.

Have a great season!



**Predator Management
increases nest success
where breeding hen
concentrations are high,
but nest success is low.**

producing 1 million ducks every year, forever. Launched in 2022, the three-year effort secured more than \$284 million in contributions and pledges to fund Delta's future Duck Production work.

As the MDC endowment builds, Delta is continuing to grow the ranks of Hen House technicians and Predator Management trappers to maximize duck production every year.

In April, Delta launched the orga-