

10/2/2015

The fall waterfowl migration is just starting on the Refuge. The most notable migrants seen on the Refuge are Green-winged Teal. Many species can be found, but no large concentrations of any one particular species currently exist. Other water birds that can be seen on the Refuge at this time include many species of shore birds, American Bitterns and White-faced Ibis. There also appear to be quite a few Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons in the area at this time. We anticipate some waterfowl movement in the next couple weeks and will be updating the website as changes occur.

10/7/2015

The first group of Tundra Swans were spotted on the Refuge this week and puddle duck numbers, such as Green-winged Teal and Gadwall have increased since last week. Very few diver ducks have been observed on the Refuge so far. We are still in the early stages of the waterfowl migration. We have not had any major cold fronts come through this fall and as a result the migration has been very slow.

Wetland conditions on and around the Refuge this year are drier than what we have seen in six or more years. Many wetlands that have held water for six or more years are now dry and getting drier each day. The Refuge water levels will be slowly going down throughout the fall as the Refuge attempts to draw the water down for vegetative growth next spring.

The Refuge roads will be closed for the year on October 17th.

10/14/2015

Tundra Swan numbers are starting to build up on the Refuge. There were approximately 75 observed on the Refuge this afternoon. Several sightings of Tundra Swans on area wetlands off the Refuge have also been reported.

Overall duck numbers on the Refuge have remained low, but consistent. Blue-winged teal have migrated out of the area, but good numbers of Green-winged teal have replaced them. Currently, Northern Shovelers are the most common duck observed on the Refuge. A few flocks of divers such as, Lesser Scaup, Redheads, and Canvasbacks have also been observed.

The first flock of snow geese seen on the Refuge this fall were observed this afternoon.

Area waterfowl numbers off of the Refuge have been good, with quite a few ducks using other wetlands. Water conditions around the Refuge are low and getting lower. Less than 1" of precipitation has fallen at Refuge Headquarters since August 20th.

The Refuge gates will be closing for the year at the end of the day on Friday October 16, 2015 as the Refuge Archery season will begin the next day. Waterfowl and other bird viewing can still be made where roads cross the Refuge, this includes SD HWY 10 or 117th Street.

10/23/15

Not much has changed since the last report. However there are a few Tundra Swans starting to build up on the Refuge. Most of the swans are located south of HWY 10 on Sand Lake. With more corn being harvested daily, there has been a few flocks of field feeding mallards observed, but competition by hunters for the few fields being used by mallards has been high.

With much cooler temperatures predicted for later next week, we are hopeful that there will be a good push of new birds into the area at that time. We will update this report as significant changes occur.

10/25/2015

We now have some very small flocks of snow geese on the Refuge and feeding in local fields. It also appears the Swan numbers increased quite a bit the last few days. The amount of Mallards that have been feeding in area corn fields is also increasing. With this week's cooler temperatures predicted, we anticipate to see quite a bit of migration through the area within the next 7 days.

11/3/2015

Waterfowl numbers on the refuge remain fairly similar to the last migration update. The majority of the area corn fields are harvested, and small groups of snow geese have been seen around Sand Lake. There are also swans continuing to use the refuge.

11/5/2015

Mallard numbers on the Refuge have increased dramatically in the last week, but overall duck numbers on the Refuge and in the area outside the Refuge are very low. Mallard numbers on the Refuge are estimated to be around 30,000. Swan numbers are staying strong also at over 300. All other duck numbers on the Refuge have decreased in the last week. The warmer temperatures have caused the bulk of the duck migration to stay in Canada. Most of the area cornfields have been harvested.

Snow Goose numbers on the Refuge have slowly increased to a few thousand. There is quite a few Canada Geese using the Refuge and surround cornfields at this time also.

The largest number of waterfowl using the Refuge can be seen from SD Hwy 10.

We anticipate Refuge waterfowl numbers to grow significantly in the next 10 days, as a cool down and a chance of snow is predicted for late next week.

11/09/2015

This past weekend brought in large numbers of snow geese and mallards to the Refuge. It appears that we currently have about 100,000 snow geese and 100,000 mallards on the Refuge. Swan numbers also look to be on the rise at around 500. A few hundred white-fronted geese have been observed on the Refuge. There are still many other species of waterfowl on the Refuge, but those numbers have not fluctuated like mallards and snow geese.

With a cold front predicted for mid-week, we anticipate a change in these numbers. We will provide updates if significant changes occur.

11/16/2015

During the last 10 days, Sand Lake has seen a significant increase in all waterfowl numbers. There are easily over 100,000 snow geese and mallards each on the Refuge, along with many other species of ducks. There are also good numbers of Canada Geese and White-fronted Geese on the Refuge. Tundra Swan numbers remain strong and are holding at around 500.

We expect these numbers to continue to grow throughout the coming week. But later this week and into the weekend we anticipate that most of the Refuge will freeze up as highs are only predicted in the low 30s. While some birds will continue to use the Refuge and keep small areas of water open, weather patterns like this usually signify the end of the migration through Sand Lake for the year.

If any significant waterfowl numbers change from the above estimates, we will provide an update.

11/19/2015

We are currently at the peak of the waterfowl migration at Sand Lake. If you are a bird watcher or a hunter, now is the time to get to the Refuge. There is an estimated 250,000 snow geese and 150,000 mallards on the Refuge at this time. Although, these numbers are sure to change very quickly. With much cooler temperatures and light winds predicted for the weekend, the shallow waters of the Refuge will likely be mostly frozen in just a few days. Some ducks and geese will certainly keep pockets of water open through the weekend, but we predict that the majority of waterfowl will be migrating out of and through the area in the next 3 days.

Tundra Swan numbers have also peaked on the Refuge. The current estimate of Tundra Swans is over 500. Many species of waterfowl can be seen on the Refuge at this time, but as stated above, things will be changing rapidly during the next 3 days.

The best waterfowl viewing areas are currently from SD HWY 10 and along Brown County 16, south of the Refuge HQ.

11/24/2015

Waterfowl numbers on the refuge have decreased since the last update, due to cold temperatures and the majority of the lake freezing over. There is still open water along the river channel, and the remaining ducks on the refuge have been observed mostly south of headquarters along Brown County Hwy 16 with some smaller flocks on Hwy 10.

We estimate there are roughly 100,000 snow geese still in the area. The geese have been observed feeding in surrounding corn fields and using the remaining pockets of open water on the refuge. This is also a great time to spot migrating Bald Eagles on the ice as they follow the waterfowl migration.

With the cold temperatures predicted for the rest of the week, we anticipate that most of the birds will be moving out of the area in the next couple days.

12/3/2015

As of this morning, the Refuge still has some open water with a few hundred Canada Geese and Mallards using it. There is currently about 4" of snow on the ground. It appears that the birds are using different fields each time they go out to feed and so they have been very difficult to pattern. Even though warmer temperatures are predicted for the near future, with few waterfowl to the north, we do not expect any large numbers to move into the Refuge even if Refuge water opens back up. There have been a few Snowy Owls spotted just north of Refuge Headquarters. Bald Eagles are also a very common sighting at this time.

This will be the last Migration Report for the season.