

10/16/2019

The migration of waterfowl this fall has been steady. Although, with high water levels surrounding the Refuge, many waterfowl can be found on surrounding private and public lands as well. History has shown that in high water years, when wetlands outside the Refuge are freshly flooded from spring snow melt and rain runoff, waterfowl are just as likely (or even more likely) to be found off the Refuge as they are on the Refuge. Bottom line is that during times of high water in Sand Lake NWR and surrounding areas, such as now, waterfowl often prefer the freshly flooded wetland areas outside the Refuge rather than the Refuge itself.

There are a few thousand ducks on the Refuge at this time, with the majority of species being puddle ducks such as Mallards, Gadwall, and Shovelers. A few hundred Canada Geese and White-fronted Geese have also been observed using the Refuge.

A few Tundra Swans have also been reported on and around the Refuge.

While the recent winter storm had Snow Geese on the move, no concentrations have been reported in the area. We are still likely 3-4 weeks away from seeing large concentrations of Snow Geese in the Sand Lake area.

10/22/2019

Waterfowl numbers are holding steady on the Refuge and surrounding areas for the time being. The majority of crops in the area are currently unharvested, due to extremely high water levels both on and off the Refuge. With the unusually high water levels throughout the Sand Lake Refuge area of Brown County, waterfowl populations will be widely scattered. White-fronted geese were seen flying over the Refuge the past weekend, as well as a few very small flocks of snow geese. Tundra swans can be found on wetlands north of Groton along Hwy 37. Very few swans are currently using the Refuge due largely to deep water conditions. The Sand Lake Auto Tour Route and Refuge roads closed for the season on Friday, October 18th. We expect waterfowl numbers to slowly increase as the days get shorter and weather remains relatively mild.

10/29/2019

The waterfowl migration continues at a slow pace. A few small flocks of snow geese have been seen on the Refuge along with a small increase in diving ducks. About 10,000 snow geese were observed feeding south of Ipswich, SD this past weekend. Water levels on the James River are approaching unprecedented high levels for this time of the year. As stated previously, due to the high water conditions across eastern South Dakota the waterfowl populations will be scattered during the migration this fall. Most soybeans in the area have been harvested, and the corn harvest is just getting started.

11/02/2019

The waterfowl migration continues at a slow pace, but we have had a slight increase in Mallards recently. A few small flocks of snow geese have been seen on the Refuge along with an increase in diving ducks, specifically Lesser Scaup (Bluebills). Recent colder temperatures have iced up area wetlands to larger bodies of water in North Dakota, sending more ducks to the Refuge. There was a definite increase in Mallards observed Friday afternoon. Nighttime temperatures look like they will be warm enough to keep the Refuge water open for another week or so, but most of the shallower water in the area has been iced up to some extent.

11/4/2019

Approximately 50,000 snow geese were counted this morning on the Sand Lake Pool of the Refuge. A definite increase in mallard ducks was noted as well. An estimated 500-600 tundra swans were found off Refuge using shallow wetlands on private lands. Some wetlands were holding over 100 birds per wetland. Water levels on the Refuge continue to rise and most all interior Refuge roads are now underwater. Several township roads adjacent to the Refuge are closed as well. The high water conditions are predicted to remain well into winter.

11/8/2019

Sand Lake Refuge is now approximately 98% frozen. While warmer temperatures this weekend may open parts of it back up, it appears that the majority of waterfowl have migrated south. Colder temperatures next week appear conducive to a total freeze-up by mid-week. A decrease in ducks and geese using the Refuge has been observed. Most swans that were using the Refuge have also moved on. Due to flooded roads it is very difficult to get an accurate count of waterfowl on the Refuge, but it appears that there is still several thousand ducks in the few open water areas. Most of the waterfowl appear to be north of Hwy 10.

Water levels on the Refuge are very high, and many interior Refuge roads are flooded. Several township roads adjacent to the Refuge are closed as well. The high water conditions are predicted to remain well into winter.

11/14/2019

Sand Lake NWR is approximately 99% frozen. Although warmer temperatures in the next week will create more open water, there are few waterfowl north of us to increase our current numbers significantly.

There are about 10,000 snow geese on the Refuge, and also about the same number of ducks. A couple thousand Canada geese have been observed on the Refuge and adjacent fields. While Sand Lake waterfowl numbers are relatively low, there are 100,000+ snow geese in the Brown County area using other water. Large Mallard concentrations can also be found off the Refuge. It's been reported that Putney Slough is holding a lot of waterfowl.

Also, currently Hwy 10 is a good area to view moderate numbers of Bald Eagles.

Water levels on the Refuge continue to be very high, and most Refuge roads as well as some surrounding township roads are flooded. These water conditions are predicted to remain well into 2020.

11/20/2019

Refuge staff estimate Sand Lake to be roughly 95% frozen. Warmer temperatures in recent days has created some additional open water.

There are about 50,000 snow geese on the Refuge, and about 20,000 ducks. A few thousand Canada geese have been observed on the Refuge. While Sand Lake waterfowl numbers are relatively low, there are additional snow geese and mallards in the Brown County area using other water.

Also, Bald Eagles are quite common in the area and can be easily viewed all around the Refuge.

Water levels on the Refuge remain high, and most Refuge roads as well as some surrounding township roads are flooded.

12/3/2019

Sand Lake NWR area received 10-12" of snow this past weekend. Colder temperatures accompanied the snow, which froze 99.9% of the Refuge. A few small flocks of Canada geese were observed early this week, but it is anticipated that they will move out soon as all the surrounding fields are now snow covered.

Bald Eagles are still quite common in the area and can be easily viewed all around the Refuge.

Water levels on the Refuge remain high, and most Refuge roads as well as some surrounding township roads are flooded.