

Horicon National Wildlife Refuge Fall 2021 Migration Report

10/27/2021

This is week seven of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. SE WI finally had its first frost this week. We still are awaiting a hard freeze in the area. It looks like that will come next week.

Canada goose numbers increased to around 50,000 this week. This is the highest count so far this fall. Farmers continue to harvest corn in the area. Most other crop harvesting is completed for the year. Check out these harvested fields as the geese make several flights out of the marsh each day to feed.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 86,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards (30,000), green-winged teal (20,000), Northern pintails (14,000), American wigeon (14,000), gadwall and Northern shovelers. Only black ducks were counted in the hundreds. Less than 50 wood ducks and blue-winged teal were counted.

Diving duck numbers continue to remain low – around 1200. Ring-necked ducks, ruddy ducks, redheads, and lesser scaup were counted in the hundreds. Canvasbacks, buffleheads, and hooded mergansers were counted with less than 50 of each species.

Other sightings to note

- Pintails in full plumage can be seen in large numbers.
- Sandhill cranes are gathering at the marsh for their annual stopover. You can watch their daily flights in and out of the marsh. Sunrise and one hour before sunset are the best times to see large flocks transition between the roosting and feeding grounds.
- You might spot a snow goose or blue goose if you look closely. Check out large flocks of geese flying in/out of the marsh.
- Yellowlegs are still hanging out in the last impoundment along the auto tour.

The auto tour route continues to have great wildlife viewing. Look at the impoundment in the center of the auto tour. During the summer, with no water, this area grew many plants that ducks love. This week large flocks of waterfowl (gadwall, pintail, and wigeon) have been seen along Hwy 49 – check the north side.

10/19/2021

This is week six of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. SE WI continues to have exceptionally mild weather. Temperatures were in the 60 and 70's all week. We are still waiting on the first freeze of the season.

Canada goose numbers remained near the same this week. Around 35,000 were counted on the refuge. More crops near the Refuge were harvested in the last. Check out these harvested fields as the geese make several flights out of the marsh each day to feed.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 125,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards (65,000+), green-winged teal (22,000), Northern pintails (13,000), American wigeon (13,000), and gadwall. Others seen in the hundreds included Northern shovelers, black ducks, and blue-winged teal. Only a couple wood ducks were counted this week.

Diving duck numbers continue to remain low – around 1200. Ruddy ducks were the most numerous ~700. Other species spotted in small groups included lesser scaup, ring-necked ducks, redheads, and canvasbacks. A change in weather patterns to more "Fall-like" temperatures will likely bring more diving ducks in.

Other sightings to note:

- Impressive numbers of mallards and green-winged teal are here. Large flocks were counted feeding and roosting out in the middle of the marsh.
- You might spot a snow goose or blue goose if you look closely. Check out large flocks of geese flying in/out of the marsh.
- Yellowlegs are still hanging out in the last impoundment along the auto tour.
- Notably absent – >20 of each counted. Wood ducks, egrets, great blue herons, double-crested cormorants, and American white pelicans.

The auto tour route continues to have great wildlife viewing. This week more large flocks of waterfowl are have been seen along Hwy 49 – check the north side. This week 22 different species were spotted along Hwy 49.

10/14/2021

This is week five of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. SE WI continues to have exceptionally mild weather. Temperatures were in the 60 and 70's all week. These warm temperatures are the second warmest start to October on record.

Canada goose numbers remained near the same this week. Around 35,000 were counted on the refuge. Flocks in the hundreds were seen flying out of the Refuge to feed in the surrounding harvested fields.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 128,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards (50,000+), green-winged teal (40,000), Northern pintails, American wigeon, gadwall, Northern shovelers, and blue-winged teal. Others seen in the hundreds included wood ducks, and black ducks.

Diving duck numbers continue to remain low – around 1200. Ruddy ducks were the most numerous at 500+. Other species spotted in small groups included redheads, lesser scaup, ring-necked ducks, and canvasbacks. A change in weather patterns to more "Fall-like" temperatures will likely bring more diving ducks in.

Other sightings to note:

- Impressive numbers of mallards and green-winged teal are here. Large flocks were counted feeding and roosting out in the middle of the marsh.
- Northern pintails are finally here in bigger numbers. This is about 3 weeks later than normal.
- Large rafts of American coot continue to gather for migration. Nearly 6,500 are here and will vanish in the darkness as they prefer to migrate at night.
- Yellowlegs continue bobbing and calling in the last impoundment along the auto tour. These are the last shorebirds of the migration.
- Only a few American white pelicans (>50) remain in the area.

The auto tour route and Ledge road continue to be the best for wildlife viewing. Check out the last impoundment on the right- before the exit of the auto tour. Also, travel down the west section of Ledge Road that enters the marsh and look along the north side. This week 20 different species were spotted here.

10/6/2021

This is week four of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. SE WI continues to have exceptionally mild weather. Temperatures were in the 70's all week.

Canada goose numbers increased slightly this week. More than 40,000 were counted on the refuge. Flocks in the hundreds were seen flying out of the Refuge to feed in the surrounding harvested fields.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 88,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards, green-winged teal, American wigeon, blue-winged teal, gadwall, Northern shovelers, and Northern pintails. Others seen in the hundreds included wood ducks, and black ducks.

Diving duck numbers remained very low – around 300. Redhead ducks were the most numerous at 180. Other species spotted included ruddy ducks, a couple lesser scaup and ring-necked ducks, and a couple canvasbacks. Diving duck numbers are expected to increase in the next 2 weeks as fall progresses to cooler weather.

Other sightings to note:

- Clouds of green-winged teal were counted. Watch for flocks of ducks that resemble swarms of bees. Teal are masters of synchronized flight as they lift and drop back down to water.
- Large rafts of American coot are gathering. Look along Ledge Road. Groups of 500+ were seen.
- Sandhill crane numbers are increasing in the area – watch for flocks in the hundreds in farm fields – especially along the east side of the marsh. Flocks were seen feeding and dancing in harvested soybeans. The best viewing is often during the first 3 hours of daylight as they leave the marsh. Look along Ledge Rd, Point Rd, and Cty Hwy Z.
- Yellowlegs continue bobbing and calling in the last impoundment along the auto tour. These are the last shorebirds of the migration.

- Gull migration is nearing the fall peak. Nearly 2,000 ring-billed gulls are in the area.

The auto tour route and Ledge road continue to be the best for wildlife viewing. Check out the last impoundment on the right- before the exit of the auto tour. Also, travel down the west section of Ledge Road that enters the marsh and look along the north side. This week 19 different species were spotted here.

9/29/2021

This is week three of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. SE WI continues to have exceptionally mild weather. Temperatures were in the 70's and 80's much of the week.

Canada goose numbers saw a big jump this week. More than 35,000 were counted on the refuge. Fall crop harvest is in full swing. Farmers began combining corn this week, as well as, continued soybean harvesting. Geese are flying out daily to feed in the harvested fields near the marsh.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 76,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards, green-winged teal, American wigeon, blue-winged teal, gadwall, and Northern pintails. Others seen in the hundreds included Northern shovelers, wood ducks, and black ducks.

Diving duck numbers remained very low – around 300. Ruddy ducks are still the most numerous. Other species spotted included redheads, a couple lesser scaup, and a couple buffleheads. Diving duck numbers are expected to increase in the next 2 weeks as we approach mid-October.

Other sightings to note:

- Large rafts of American coot are gathering. Look along Ledge Road. Groups of 500+ were seen.
- Sandhill crane numbers are increasing in the area – watch for flocks in the hundreds in farm fields – especially along the east side of the marsh. Flocks were seen feeding and dancing in harvested soybeans. The best viewing is often during the first 3 hours of daylight as they leave the marsh. Look along Ledge Rd, Point Rd, and Cty Hwy Z.
- Yellowlegs continue bobbing and calling in the last impoundment along the auto tour. These are the last shorebirds of the migration.
- Trumpeter swans have been gathering in small family groups. They can be seen along Hwy 49.

The best viewing of waterfowl this week is along the auto tour route. Check out the last impoundment on the right- before the exit. Travel down the west section of Ledge Road that enters the marsh and look along the north side. This week 16 different species were spotted here.

9/22/2021

This is week two of waterbird surveys at the refuge for the fall migration. Weather in SE WI remains very mild for this time of year.

Canada goose numbers jumped this week as migrants started drifting in. This week nearly 14,000 were counted on the refuge. Fall crops are starting to be taken with soybean harvest underway. Geese have been spotted feeding in the harvested soybean and corn silage fields near the marsh.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey –around 54,000. Top species seen in the thousands were mallards, American wigeon, blue-winged teal, and green-winged teal. Others seen in the hundreds included gadwall, Northern shovelers, wood ducks, Northern pintails, and black ducks.

Diving duck numbers remained very low – around 300. Ruddy ducks are still the most numerous. Other species spotted included redheads, a couple lesser scaup, and a few hooded mergansers.

Other sightings to note:

- Large rafts of American coot are gathering. Look along Ledge Road.
- Sandhill crane numbers are increasing in the area – watch for flocks in the hundreds in farm fields – especially along the east side of the marsh.
- Shorebirds are still moving through the area with flocks that include short-billed dowitchers, and greater and lesser yellowlegs. Yellowlegs have been bobbing and calling in the last impoundment along the auto tour.
- Lower your window and listen for the faint whistling calls of the American wigeon. Large flocks of American wigeon are migrating through right now. Look along the auto tour and Ledge Road

The best viewing of waterfowl this week is along the auto tour route. Check out the last impoundment on the right-before the exit. Check out Ledge Road too – 19 different species were spotted here. Travel down the west section of Ledge Road that enters the marsh and look along the north side.

9/15/2021

This week is the first week of waterbird surveys at the Refuge for the 2021 fall migration. The Refuge manages 18 separate impoundments. Each impoundment has different water levels to create the necessary habitat and feeding conditions for migrating waterbirds. Current water levels and weather conditions are very typical for late September.

Canada goose numbers are low with around 1000 on the Refuge. These are local Canada geese. Migrants have not started to arrive. Farmers are starting fall harvest – mainly chopping corn silage. Geese may be found in surrounding fields that were harvested.

Dabbling ducks were most numerous on this week's survey – around 20,000. The top 4 species seen in the thousands were blue-winged teal, mallards, green-winged teal, and wigeon. Others seen in the hundreds included wood ducks, shovelers, and gadwall.

Diving duck numbers are very low right now – less than 200. Small groups of ruddy ducks may be seen in open water areas.

Other sightings to note:

Large rafts of coot – in the hundreds – are grouping up for migration.

Pied-billed grebes – in groups of 10-15 were seen all over the Refuge.

Ring-billed gulls are migrating through the area in large numbers. Nearly 1500 were counted on the Refuge.

Pelicans and cormorants began migration several weeks ago. We are down to several hundred of each.

The best viewing of waterfowl this week is along the auto tour route. Check out the last impoundment on the right-before the exit. Several thousand ducks were seen including teal, mallards, shovelers, wigeon and wood ducks. You might even spot some shorebirds hanging out in the shallowest water.