

FACT SHEET - Waterfowl Hunters and Harvests- 2015

- Liberal duck seasons (60 days, 6 bird bag limit) and resident goose seasons have resulted in high waterfowl harvests in Virginia during the past ten years. Harvest has averaged ~141,000 ducks and ~53,900 geese from 2011 - 2014, compared to 114,770 ducks and 25,000 geese during the 1990's. The long season length and liberal bags offer greater opportunity and a greater cumulative harvest over the course of the season.
- Waterfowl hunter numbers in Virginia have been generally stable since the late 1990's. Since 1999, the Harvest Information Program (HIP) has been used to estimate hunter effort and harvest. The average number of duck and goose hunters over the past 3 years, as measured by HIP, was 15,900 and 13,100 respectively.
- Cold winter conditions during the 2014-2015 season helped push migratory waterfowl from northern wintering areas into Virginia. These conditions concentrated waterfowl and encouraged local movements beneficial to hunters, likely improving hunter success. In late January low temperatures caused significant freezing throughout the state, pushing many birds to wintering areas farther south. In general, duck and goose harvests were similar to the previous year and very similar to the past 5-year average.
- The total estimated duck harvest in 2014-2015 in Virginia (141,300) was almost identical to the previous year (139,500) but was 4% below the past 5-year average (146,740).
- During the 2014-2015 season mallards were the most commonly harvested duck in Virginia, along with the bufflehead, gadwall, wood duck and surf scoter comprise the top 5 harvested species. The mallard harvest in Virginia in 2014-15 (41,300) increased by 20% from 2014-2015, and was 19% higher than the past 3-year average (33,700).
- The Canada goose harvest in Virginia in 2014-15 (45,300) decreased 22% from last year and was 16% below the past 3-year average (53,900).

FACT SHEET - The Status of Ducks- 2015

Mid-Continent Areas: Annual precipitation is the most important factor influencing the quantity and quality of nesting and brood rearing habitat for prairie-nesting birds. The number of ponds counted during the USFWS May breeding waterfowl survey is an index used for assessing waterfowl nesting conditions. Despite an early spring over most of the survey area, habitat conditions were similar to or poorer than last year. In many areas, the decline in habitat conditions was due to average or below average annual precipitation. The 2015 May pond count (6.3 million) was 12% below last year's count (7.2 million), but still 21% above the long-term average (5.2 million).

The total duck breeding population (BPOP) estimate for the mid-continent area this year is 49.5 million ducks, similar to last year's estimate of 49.2 million ducks and 43% higher than the long-term average (1955-2014). The Breeding population estimates (BPOP), along with the percent change from last year and the long-term average, are presented below for the 10 most common species.

Species	2015 BPOP	% Change from 2014	% Change from Long-Term Avg.
Mallard	11.6 million	+7%	+51%
Blue-winged Teal	8.5 million	0%	+73%
Green-winged Teal	4.0 million	+19%	+98%
Gadwall	3.8 million	+1%	+100%
Northern Shoveler	4.3 million	-17%	+75%
Northern Pintail	3.0 million	-6%	-24%
American Wigeon	3.0 million	-3%	+17%
Redhead	1.2 million	-6%	+71%
Scaup	4.4 million	-5%	-13%
Canvasback	757,000	+11%	+30%
Total Ducks	49.5 million	+1%	+43%

Eastern Breeding Areas: Winter and spring temperatures in the eastern survey area were again well below normal. Habitat conditions throughout the eastern breeding area ranged from excellent to fair. A protracted thaw in most areas likely impeded some nesting efforts.

- Breeding population estimates for the 6 most common species surveyed were slightly lower than last year and below their past ten-year averages. Black ducks (541,000) were 11% lower than last year's estimate and 13% lower than the long-term average. Other abundant species counted in the eastern survey area were Mallards (406,000), Ring-necked ducks (505,000), and Goldeneyes (358,000).

Virginia: Habitat conditions in Virginia during the spring of 2015 were fair. Delayed spring temperatures and relatively dry early conditions may have delayed some nesting efforts. Late spring precipitation re-charged many wetlands and likely encouraged any late or re-nesting efforts. Local duck and goose production is expected to be average or slightly below average.

- The breeding pair estimate for Mallards (18,618) increased and was 45% below the previous year's average. Wood duck breeding pair estimates (24,081) increased and were 10% above the previous year's average. Canada goose breeding pair estimates (40,199) increased and were 36% below the previous year's average.

FACT SHEET- The Status of Migrant Canada Geese- 2015

- Migrant Canada geese from the Atlantic Population declined significantly from the mid-1980's through the mid-1990s. The hunting season was closed in 1995 to allow the population to recover. The population rebounded quickly between 1995 and 1999, and a limited hunting season (6 days with a 1 bird bag) was held in both 1999 and 2000.
- As the population increased, hunting regulations were liberalized. The season was extended to 30 days in 2001, and 45 days in 2002. The bag limit remained at 1 per day through 2003. In 2004, the season remained at 45 days and a 2 goose daily bag was allowed for the last 20 days. From 2005 through 2011, the season was 45 days with 2 geese for the entire season. In 2012 the season was extended to 50 days with a 2 bird bag for the entire season.
- The breeding population estimate for 2015 (161,302) was 16% below the 2014 estimate.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER OF PAIRS</u>	
1988	118,031	
1993	91,307	
1994	40,086	
1995	29,302	(season closed)
1996	46,058	“ “
1997	63,216	“ “
1998	42,166	(season closed, incomplete survey)
1999	77,451	(season reopened, 6 days/1 bird)
2000	93,230	
2001	146,662	
2002	164,840	
2003	156,937	
2004	174,793	
2005	162,395	
2006	160,020	
2007	195,709	
2008	169,699	
2009	176,118	
2010	154,028	
2011	194,900	
2012	190,300	
2013	N/A	
2014	191,234	
2015	161,302	

- Habitat conditions on the nesting grounds appeared less advanced than average, and snow cover maps indicated nesting conditions that were less favorable than in 2014, particularly along the Hudson Bay coast.
- Production for 2015 is forecasted to be below average.

Canada Goose Population Zones and Hunting Zones

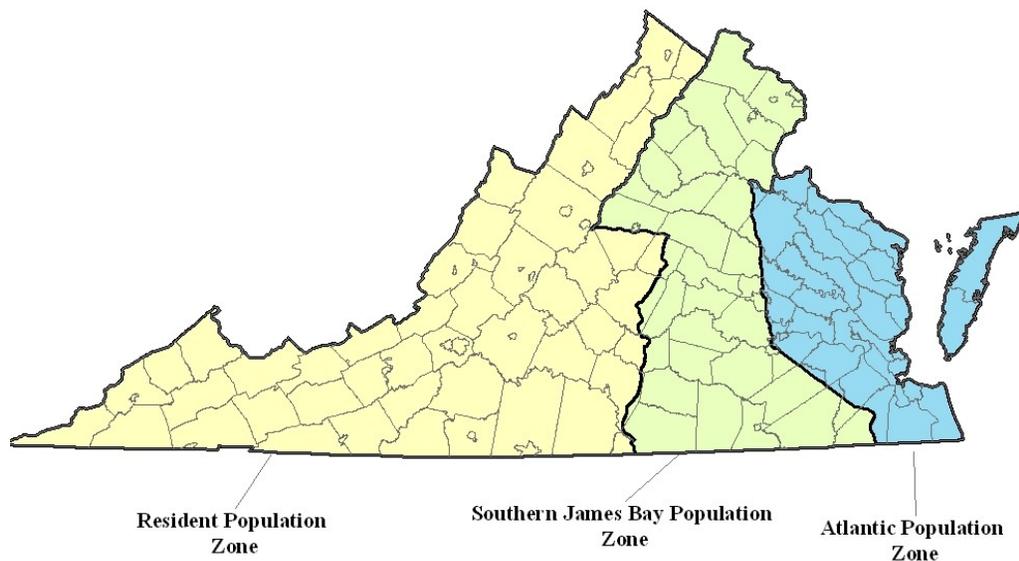
- There are 4 subpopulations of Canada geese in Virginia. These include the Atlantic Flyway Resident Population (RP) along with three migrant goose populations, the North Atlantic Population (NAP), the Southern James Bay Population (SJBP), and the Atlantic Population (AP). The majority of our migrant geese (~82%) are from the AP, about 18% are from the SJBP, and <1% are from the NAP.
- Based on recent research and banding analyses, we have been able to better delineate the distribution and migration corridors used by these different subpopulations of geese. This information allowed us to create a new hunt zone in the western part of the state in 2009 that has relatively few migrant geese and therefore was allowed to have a more liberal hunting season framework.
- We split the former “Western Hunt Zone” into two separate zones in 2009. The western-most portion of the state was designated as the Resident Population Hunt Zone (RP) and the central portion of the state was designated as the Southern James Bay Population Hunt Zone (SJBP). The eastern zone remains the same and is known as the Atlantic Population Hunt Zone.

Atlantic Population (AP) Hunt Zone – The area east of the Stafford/King George County line from the Potomac River south to the Rappahannock River, then west along the Stafford County line to Interstate 95, then south along I-95 to Route 460 in Petersburg, then southeast along Route 460 to Route 32 in the City of Suffolk, then south to the North Carolina border.

Southern James Bay Population (SJBP) Hunt Zone – The area to the west of the AP Hunt Zone boundary and east of the following line: the “Blue Ridge” (Loudoun County-Clarke County line) at the West Virginia-Virginia Border, south to Interstate 64 (the Blue Ridge line follows county borders along the western edge of Loudoun-Fauquier-Rappahannock-Madison-Greene-Albemarle and into Nelson Counties), then east along Interstate Rt. 64 to Route 15, then south along Rt. 15 to the North Carolina line.

Resident Population (RP) Hunt Zone – The portion of the state west of the SJBP Hunt Zone.

Virginia's Canada Goose Hunt Zones



FACT SHEET - The Status of Resident Canada Geese- 2015

- The resident Canada goose population increased significantly during the 1980's and early 1990's. The population peaked at over 260,000 geese in the mid-late 1990's in Virginia and has been steadily reduced by specific management programs since that time. The current population estimate is 150,650 (+/- 30,000) in Virginia and over 1 million in the Atlantic Flyway.
- Special resident goose-hunting seasons were initiated in 1993 in Virginia to help manage the resident goose population and to provide opportunities for waterfowl hunters. These seasons are designed to occur prior to the arrival of migrant geese, or in areas where there are fewer migrant geese. The first migrant geese begin to arrive in Virginia around September 25 each year, so the Federal Framework allows Virginia to conduct its resident season from September 1-25.
- There are fewer migrant geese located in the western part of the state. A special late hunting season west of I-95 was initiated in 1996-97. In 2009, we split the former "Western Hunt Zone" into two separate zones to provide even more opportunities to harvest resident geese in a new Resident Population Hunt Zone.
- Special resident goose seasons have been very popular. These seasons are also the most effective tool in managing resident goose populations in areas where hunting is allowed. Liberal hunting seasons have increased hunter participation and resident goose harvests, and have been effective in reducing the population. Harvest objectives are to maintain the statewide population at or below current levels.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Resident Goose Pop. Est.3-Year running Avg.</u>	<u>September Harvest</u>	<u>Late Season Harvest</u>
1993	115,835	2,316	--
1994	129,409	3,464	--
1995	151,043	5,500	--
1996	181,813	10,000	12,000
1997	249,612	10,500	15,400
1998	264,867	12,200	19,000
1999	261,554	12,800	21,900
2000	227,164	13,400	44,100
2001	218,384	11,800	31,800
2002	218,719	14,300	26,800
2003	192,780	14,800	17,000
2004	152,015	17,000	14,100
2005	141,377	10,100	9,200
2006	145,322	11,100	15,700
2007	157,598	13,600	11,800
2008	154,984	17,500	16,800
2009	142,311	16,800	16,600
2010	147,313	15,600	--
2011	154,637	14,700	--
2012	158,267	9,700	--
2013	144,907	10,700	--
2014	130,503	7,500	--
2015	150,650	--	--

- In areas where hunting is not feasible, other options are necessary to mitigate conflicts. New strategies including Airport, Agricultural, and Nest and Egg Depredation Orders have been implemented in the last several years to help manage resident goose conflicts.

FACT SHEET - Status of Light Geese (Greater and Lesser Snow Geese, and Ross's Geese) 2015

- The Greater Snow Goose population is monitored on spring staging areas near the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec. The 2015 population estimate was 898,000 geese (+/-7%), which is 3% higher than last year and similar to the long term average.
- The principle nesting areas for greater snow geese are on Bylot, Axel Heiberg, Ellesmere, and Baffin Islands, and on Greenland. These geese winter along the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to North Carolina.
- Conditions and nesting phenology were average in the main snow goose nesting areas this year. Annual production and the fall flight is expected to be higher than last year, and still in the average to good range.
- Over the last 30 years, snow goose populations have increased almost ten-fold. A shift from feeding almost exclusively in marshes to feeding more on agricultural grains has allowed them to expand their range and habitat use. This shift has also allowed them to return to their breeding habitats in better physical condition, which has led to increased productivity.
- This population boom has resulted in ecological degradation on their breeding, migration and wintering areas. It has also led to conflicts with agricultural interest. Snow geese can cause damage to these habitats by pulling up plant roots and denuding marshes of vegetation.
- Current hunting regulations for snow geese are as liberal as Federal Frameworks will allow and include a 107-day season that runs from October to January, and a bag limit that was increased from 15 to 25 in 2010. Liberal seasons have helped increase the harvest, however, the population is still quite large and concerns remain about detrimental impacts these birds are having on breeding and wintering habitats.
- A Conservation Order (CO) hunting season was established in 2009, and authorizes the use of alternative management strategies (unplugged shotguns, electronic calls, shooting to ½ hour after sunset, no daily bag limit) to further increase the harvest of snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway. Virginia has held a Conservation Order season for the past three years. The number of hunters participating in the season has averaged 213 per year and the harvest has averaged 557 snow geese per year, however, harvest and participation rates have gone down each year.

FACT SHEET - Status of Atlantic Brant and Tundra Swan

- **Brant.** The main breeding areas for Atlantic Brant are in the Eastern Canadian Arctic on Baffin, Southampton, and Ellesmere Islands. Most brant winter along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to North Carolina.
- Breeding habitat conditions were average to below average this year and brant production is expected to fair to poor again this year. This makes the 4th year in a row that brant production has been poor.
- The 2015 Mid-Winter Survey (MWS) count of brant in the Atlantic Flyway (111,434) was 17% lower than the 2014 estimates. The MWS three-year running average is 130,833.
- The Brant Hunt Plan was modified to reduce the hunting season to 30 days with a 1 brant/day limit this year (from 30 days, 2 brant/day last year). This reduction is expected to achieve a 33% reduction in the harvest.

- **Tundra Swans.** The Eastern Population of tundra swans nest in arctic tundra areas from the Seward Peninsula of Alaska, east to Hudson Bay and Baffin Island. These birds winter in coastal areas from Maryland to North Carolina. Production of eastern population tundra swans in 2015 is expected to be similar to last year.
- There were 107,936 eastern population tundra swans counted on the 2015 Atlantic Flyway Mid-Winter Survey, which is 7% higher than the 2014 count. The Atlantic Flyway three-year running average is 98,169 and no changes in harvest regulations are called for this year.
- Eight states in the U.S. hunt tundra swans including Alaska, Utah, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, North Carolina and Virginia. Hunting permits (9,600 total) are allocated across these states based on swan numbers and distribution.
- In the Atlantic Flyway, NC winters around 70,000 tundra swans (70% of the AF population), MD ~ 16,000, and VA ~ 6,000, with PA (~1,000), DE (300), and NJ (300) making up the bulk of the remainder. The Atlantic Flyway allocation of 5,600 permits is split between the 2 hunting states in proportion to swan numbers: NC receives 5,000 and VA receives 600.
- The tundra swan hunting season in Virginia is authorized and conducted as specified in the Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swan Management Plan and Hunt Plan, with limits and guidelines as specified under an MOU with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.