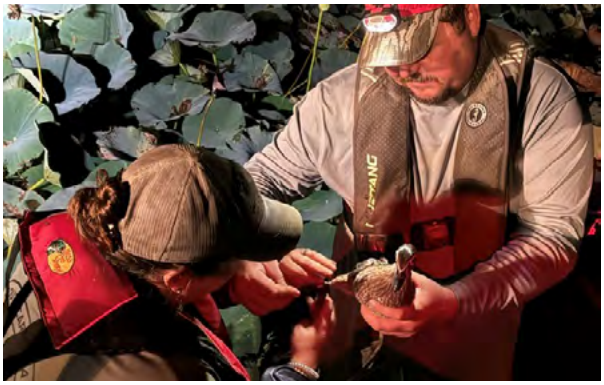
2025-2026

WATERFOWL PROJECT REPORT















SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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STATEWIDE WATERFOWL BIOLOGIST

Molly Kneece has served as Statewide Waterfowl Biologist for South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) since fall of 2021 and has been an employee of the agency in waterfowl management for nine years. She brings fifteen years of wetland and waterfowl management experience to SCDNR.

Kneece's formal waterfowl career began in 2011 in the tidal marshes and coastal impoundments of the ACE (Ashepoo, Edisto, Combahee) Basin of South Carolina. She worked on the first research project to investigate mottled duck habitat selection and nesting ecology in South Carolina. Looking to further her career and gain valuable waterfowl management experience, she obtained a Master of Science in Waterfowl Ecology and Management (2016) at Mississippi State University. During her studies, Kneece developed and completed a research project investigating survival, breeding and brood-rearing ecology of mottled ducks in the tidal impoundments of coastal South Carolina. While completing this research in SC, Kneece had the opportunity to work alongside and learn from some of the most tenured and successful waterfowl habitat managers on private, state, and federally owned properties in the ACE Basin. With experience gained in the field and through her degree studies, Kneece developed a unique skill set for understanding the art and implementing the science of managing habitat for waterfowl in brackish and moist soil wetlands in coastal South Carolina—skills that she applies in her current position on a daily basis.

As Statewide Waterfowl Biologist, Kneece's duties are to:

1. Provide technical assistance and habitat management guidance to support SCDNR field staff working on agency waterfowl areas and public waterfowl hunting areas.
2. Implement a waterfowl management area review program that evaluates wetland habitats, management regimes, infrastructure, and waterfowl hunt programs on all SCDNR waterfowl properties.
3. Assist with the implementation and evaluation of the Waterfowl Lottery Hunt Program by seeking ways to increase public hunting opportunities, enhance existing public hunting areas, and establish new waterfowl hunting areas.
4. Represent interests of the state of South Carolina and the agency on the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section.
5. Provide leadership and guidance for the annual selection of migratory bird hunting regulations.
6. Develop standard monitoring programs and coordinate research for waterfowl issues of management concern.
7. Provide educational opportunities and technical assistance for state and federal agencies, and public constituent groups.
8. Cultivate relationships with constituent groups through updates and outreach to foster good rapport and support for waterfowl in South Carolina.

STATEWIDE WATERFOWL BIOLOGIST REPORT

At quarterly meetings of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee, Biologist Molly Kneece provides an overview of activities completed and in progress as they relate to the State Waterfowl Program. The following is an overview of those activities from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & HABITAT MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Kneece completed 19 site visits to Category 1 Waterfowl Areas to observe habitat conditions and provide technical guidance on habitat management and infrastructure projects. Additional meetings on site or virtually were conducted with area Biologists, Regional Coordinators, and Assistant Chiefs to discuss modifications to management techniques and crop selections or locations for the 2026 growing season for the following sites: Bear Island, Beaverdam, Bonneau Ferry, Clemson, and Donnelley Waterfowl Areas. For public waterbodies, Kneece reviewed wood duck box placement and production reports for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission licensing requirements for 99 Islands and Gaston Shoals Hydroelectric Facilities.

THE WETLAND REVIEW PROGRAM

Wetland Review Reports for Beaverdam, Clemson, and Broad River Waterfowl Areas have been completed. Reports from those properties can be found at https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/waterfowl.html. The next Wetland Review is scheduled for implementation in Fall 2027 to include Coosawhatchie, Bonneau Ferry, and Sandy Beach Waterfowl Areas. These properties are all predominantly plant and flood areas. Kneece will be working to identify panelists with considerable experience in selecting and growing agricultural crops and infrastructure design.

WATERFOWL LOTTERY HUNT IMPLEMENTATION

During the 2025-2026 waterfowl season, Kneece attended 17 waterfowl lottery hunts to interact with lottery hunt participants. Kneece, regional staff, Lottery Hunt Coordinator Emily Kearse, and Videographer Allison DeVore collected considerable video footage and pictures at each lottery hunt site. Pictures and video footage will be used for an upcoming video production to help hunters prepare for and know what to expect at each lottery hunt site. An interactive public harvest dashboard for waterfowl lottery hunt harvest results was made available on the SCDNR webpage for the 2025-2026 waterfowl season and was well received by the public.

ATLANTIC FLYWAY COUNCIL TECHNICAL SECTION

Kneece attended six meetings to represent interests of the state of South Carolina and the Agency on the Atlantic Flyway Council Technical Section. Relevant topics for the previous year include: Season framework recommendations for 2026-2027; Assessments of Mississippi and Atlantic Flyway wood duck banding quotas; Implementation of a more efficient system for approval and publishing of state selected migratory bird seasons by the USFWS; Representing state and flyway interests in black duck and black-bellied whistling duck working groups.

SELECTION OF MIGRATORY BIRD SEASONS

Kneece and staff developed 2026-2027 Migratory Bird Hunting Season recommendations based on season framework recommendations of Multi-Stock Adaptive Harvest Management strategies adopted by the USFWS in fall 2025. Staff recommendations were presented to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Board for comment. With support from both Advisory Committees, the SCDNR Board approved the recommended seasons on March 27, 2026. USFWS approval of state selections of 2026-2027 Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons was published to the Federal Register (Vol. 91, No. 167) on August 31, 2026.

DEVELOP & COORDINATE STANDARD MONITORING PROGRAMS & RESEARCH

Kneece coordinated numerous monitoring programs for habitat, waterfowl abundance, public use, and lottery hunt results. Details of these monitoring programs can be found throughout this report. Kneece also coordinated the statewide waterfowl banding program. From July-September 2025 (pre-season banding), staff banded 514 ducks (433 wood ducks, 79 mottled ducks, and 2 black-bellied whistling ducks). From February to March 2026 in conjunction with research projects, staff banded 227 ducks (204 American green-winged teal, 14 wood ducks, and 9 mallards). Staff monitored at least 900 wood duck boxes on the Santee Cooper Lake system. A program was rolled out in early summer 2026 to formally monitor wood duck box use on all wildlife management areas (WMA).

OUTREACH

Biologist Molly Kneece, Assistant Chief Sam Chappelear, and Regional Coordinator Alicia Farrell were invited to represent the Agency at “Explore Charleston—Cooking Ducks”. This was a joint event sponsored by the Charleston Visitors Bureau and the Charleston Chapter of Ducks Unlimited. Alongside a cooking demonstration, the event highlighted the importance of wetlands to the greater Charleston areas and promoted conservation partnerships. Kneece was invited to speak to the group about the significance of wetlands for wildlife and promoted many of the SCDNR waterfowl areas located near Charleston and neighboring counties.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

In partnership with Ducks Unlimited, funding was secured through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to renovate and restore function to the Green Tree Reservoir (GTR) on Wateree River HP (Heritage Preserve) WMA. Engineering, project design, and permitting began in Spring 2026. Upon completion, the project will contribute an additional 30 acres of unique habitat to the Waterfowl Lottery Hunt Program and enhance an additional 50 acres of wetland habitat adjacent to the GTR. Updates to the project will be provided quarterly to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee and in subsequent versions of this annual report. The project is scheduled for completion by Winter 2028.

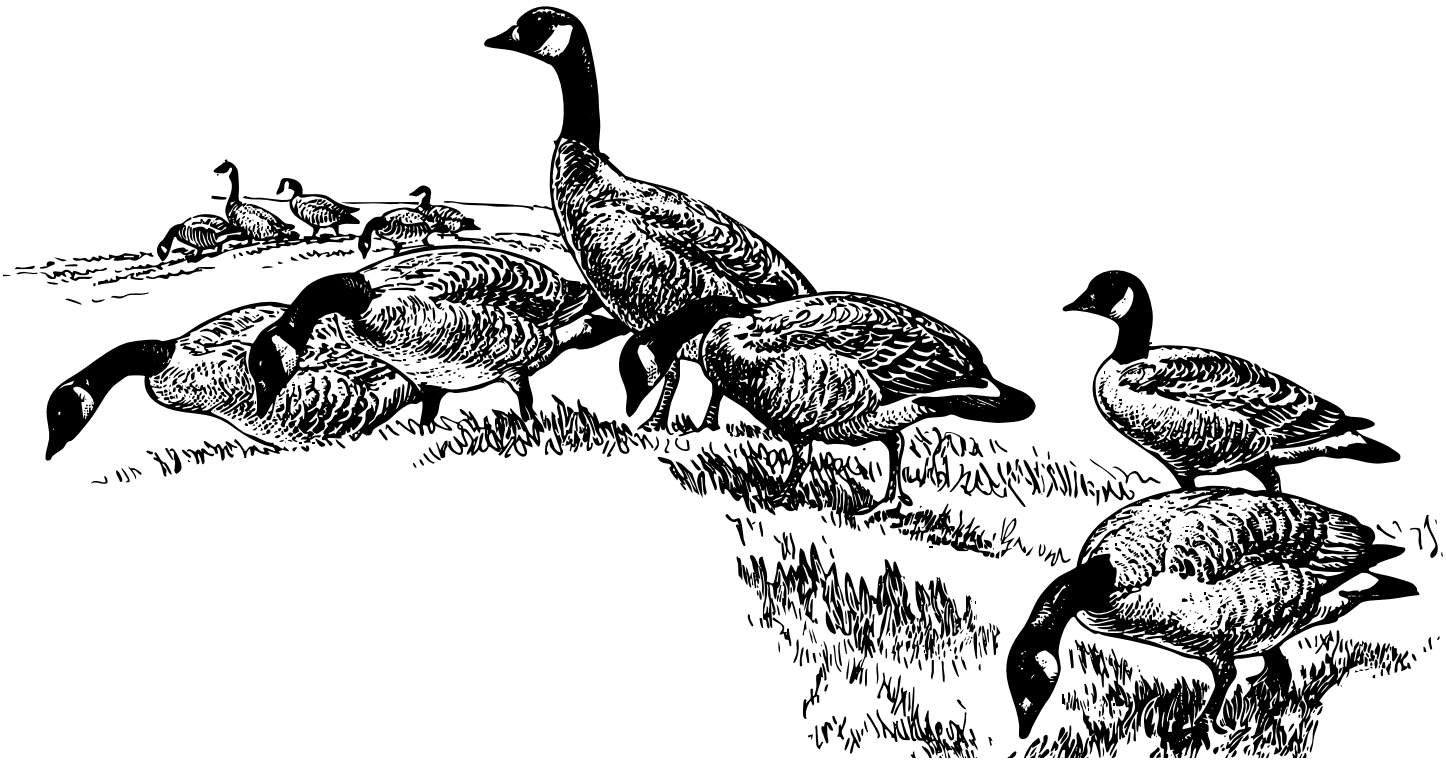
RESEARCH UPDATES

MIGRATION ECOLOGY AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF EASTERN MALLARDS, 2022-2026

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources has partnered with 22 agencies, including state natural resources agencies, USFWS, the Canadian Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, University of Saskatchewan (USASK), State University of New York (SUNY) Brockport, and a private landowner group to study the migration ecology and reproductive parameters of Eastern mallards in the United States and Eastern Canada.

The Eastern mallard breeding population is comprised of those individuals breeding in the Northeast US and Eastern Canada. In the mid-1990s, Eastern mallard breeding populations (BPOP) peaked at approximately 1.4 million (USFWS 2019). Since that time, the Eastern mallard BPOP declined 23%, with the Northeast US sub-population down 49% and Eastern Canada sub-population up 23%. However, from 2010-2025 the population plateaued or is relatively stable with declines of approximately 1.2% per year.

This project was designed to increase our knowledge of population dynamics to more effectively manage the population of Eastern mallards. This project is providing biologists and managers more reliable estimates of productivity, brood survival, and seasonal survival at sub-population scales. Using locations from hen mallards outfitted with GPS transmitters, researchers continue to monitor daily survival and behavioral patterns, habitat use, nest locations and success, and movements. Using drone technologies, researchers have evaluated daily survival of broods with hens having GPS transmitters. Using this information, researchers are gaining critical knowledge of Eastern mallard habitat use and selection during the breeding season. All location information has and will continue to be valuable for property managers looking to improve breeding, staging, and wintering habitat throughout the



Atlantic Flyway. Seasonal survival and production metrics are beginning to provide biologists with important information that can be used to evaluate the performance of harvest strategy models used to recommend hunting season lengths and bag limits in the Atlantic Flyway.

Field seasons for the project have concluded but were conducted from late winter through early spring, 2022 through 2026. During that period, 1,381 GPS transmitters were deployed on female mallards in 14 states and 3 Atlantic Canada Regions. Of those transmitters, 26 were deployed in South Carolina. All individuals marked in South Carolina were captured on private land in Kershaw (6 transmitters), Spartanburg (14), Greenwood (3), and Clarendon (2) Counties.

As of May 2026, preliminary data indicate that 225 birds remain alive of the1,381 marked throughout the study area. From the SC marked sample, 5 hen mallards remain alive, 9 are considered missing (i.e. have not reported locations in > 3 months), and 12 are confirmed mortalities. Migration movements from January 2022 through August 2026 of marked individuals emphasize the importance of the Great Lakes and Southern Ontario regions for mallards that winter in South Carolina (**Figure 1**).

Three Master of Science candidates at SUNY Brockport under the direction of Dr. Jacob Straub, are working toward completing theses and peer-reviewed publications. Daria Sparks is investigating, “Migration Chronology and Habitat Use of Mallards in the Atlantic Flyway” and is projected to complete her thesis in Fall 2026. Sparks has examined habitat selection at the Bird Conservation Region Scale. She recently determined that 30% of migratory mallards demonstrated interannual winter site fidelity (*unpublished data*). Sparks’ work has also classified several million GPS locations into seasons and uses those movements to quantify resident versus migratory behavior. Abbey Bulter studied “Mallard Brood Habitat Use and Survival in the Atlantic Flyway” and defended her thesis in Summer 2026. Bulter monitored 165 mallard broods and reported apparent brood survival of 41.9% for the entire study area. Brood survival did not differ between the Eastern Survey Area (Eastern Canada) and the Atlantic Flyway Breeding Waterfowl Survey Area (NE and Mid-Atlantic States). Bulter’s study also determined that brood survival was influenced most by hatch date, with broods hatching early in the season having a greater probability of success. Bulter is currently working toward publishing manuscripts of her work in scientific journals. April Soule is the newest addition to the Eastern Mallard Research Project and the Straub Laboratory. Using the dataset from marked mallards generated since 2022, Soule will be examining mallard stopover ecology.

Cassidy Waldrep, a PhD student at the University of Saskatchewan under the direction of Dr. Mitch Weegman, will produce a dissertation titled “Eastern Mallard Migration, Population, and Behavioral Ecology.” Waldrep currently has two manuscripts under review for scientific publication. The first manuscript on time-activity budgets of marked Eastern mallards is under review by Oecologia. The second manuscript under review by IBIS, assesses daily survival following transmitter attachment on Eastern mallards. Waldrep is also writing a third chapter of her dissertation, examining habitat use of marked Eastern mallards during the breeding season.

Future publications from the culmination of data from this project will make considerable contributions to our understanding of mallard ecology, habitat use, and migration in Atlantic Flyway for many years to come.

ESTABLISHING ORIGINS OF ATLANTIC FLYWAY DABBLING DUCK HARVEST

Dr. Michael Schummer of SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, in collaboration with Nemours Wildlife Foundation and Environment Climate Change Canada have developed a Master of Science study "Establishing origins of Atlantic Flyway dabbling duck harvest using stable isotope and band vector analysis."

Dabbling duck species comprise a substantial portion of the harvest for many Atlantic Flyway states. In the south Atlantic region, American green-winged teal, gadwall, and American wigeon typically make up a greater proportion of the harvest than mallards. In the mid-Atlantic and northern states, these same species also contribute to a considerable proportion of early season harvest, prior to the arrival of mallards and black ducks. Combined, the harvest of American green-winged teal, gadwall, and American wigeon make up less than 20% of annual harvest in the Atlantic Flyway. Breeding densities of waterfowl in eastern Canada are typically low; however, they may contribute more to Atlantic Flyway harvest than detected by annual surveys or banding.

Current survey methodologies provide little information on abundances that may originate from eastern Canada and population estimates for gadwall and wigeon are not reported for eastern North America. Pre-season banding data is also limited for species in this region due to logistical challenges across such a vast and inaccessible area. Therefore, this study will use stable isotope analysis informed by winter banding data to determine the relative origins of American green-winged teal, gadwall, and American wigeon across their breeding range to estimate percentages and origins wintering in the Atlantic Flyway. This study will provide information that is not available through traditional survey and banding methods and will provide a greater understanding of mid-continent vs. eastern Canada contributions to the abundance of these species harvested in the Atlantic Flyway.

In winter 2024-25 and 2025-26, researchers will collect feather samples (American green-winged teal, gadwall, American wigeon) from the USFWS Parts Collection Survey and partners from New York to South Carolina. These feathers will be used for isotope analysis. Using winter banding and recovery data, ducks will be placed into an origin category (east or west of James Bay) as a weighting method for isotope results.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources contributed a total of 141 wings (74 AGWT, 43 GADW, 24 AMWI) from the species of interest for isotope analysis. Staff collected one wing from each hunter harvested duck of the species of interest from Santee Coastal Reserve. A total of 159 ducks (115 AGWT, 41 BWTE, 1 GADW, and 2 AMWI) were banded at the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center in contribution to the banding vector portion of the study. We will continue wing collections and winter banding in winter 2025-26 in contribution to the study.

2025-26 WATERFOWL LOTTERY HUNT PARTICIPATION AND HARVEST RESULTS

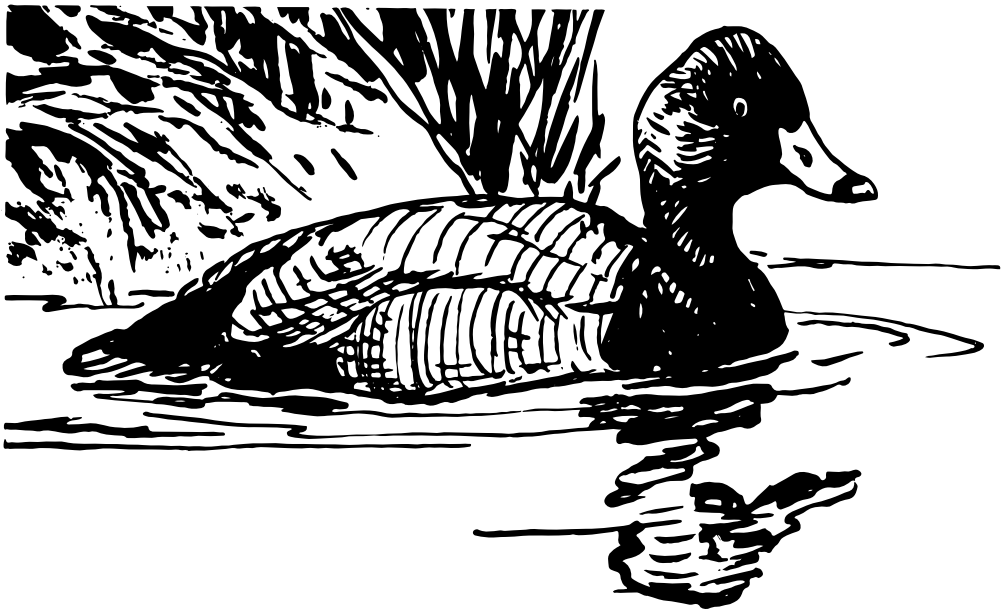
Category 1 waterfowl areas are available to hunters only by special permit obtained through the SCDNR Lottery Hunt Program. These areas are managed to attract and hold ducks for the duration of the waterfowl season and disturbance is managed by limiting hunting days. During the 2025-26 waterfowl season, Category 1 Waterfowl Lottery Hunts were conducted on 11 WMAs: Beaverdam Creek, Bear Island, Broad River, Clemson, Coosawhatchie, Donnelley, Sandy Beach, Samworth, Santee Coastal Reserve, Santee Delta (East and West), and Wateree River HP.

The 2025-26 waterfowl season provided 108 lottery waterfowl hunting opportunities for 1,103 individuals. We experienced a 91% participation rate for lottery waterfowl hunts across all sites (Table 1).

Coosawhatchie HP WMA, located in Hampton and Jasper Counties, was a new addition to the Waterfowl Lottery Hunt Program in the 2025-2026 season. The property contributed four additional hunts to the program. The number of hunts hosted is expected to increase on the property in upcoming seasons as staff learn and continue to improve the waterfowl areas.

Since the1998-1999 season, waterfowl hunters have enjoyed a six-duck per day bag limit. The long-term ducks per hunter harvest average (with a six-duck bag limit) for all Category 1 hunt sites is 3.1 ducks per hunter. The 2025-2026 harvest average of 3.2 ducks per hunter for all Category 1 lottery hunt properties is comparable to the long-term average (Figure 2) and exceeds the 2.8 ducks per hunter average in 2024-2025. Most sites exceeded the harvest and improved ducks per hunter averages compared to the previous season (Figure 3).

The top five species of harvest were green-winged teal (32%), gadwall (11%), Northern pintail (10%), wood duck (9%), and Northern shoveler (8%). Table 2 reports harvest composition and harvest averages by property for the 2025-2026 season.



Notable accomplishments for the season include:

- Broad River Waterfowl Area tied the highest harvest average (2.5 ducks per hunter) for the previous ten seasons. The long-term harvest average on this property is 2.2 ducks per hunter. Thirty percent of the harvest this season was comprised of mallards.
- Donnelley WMA recorded their second highest average since 1998, under the six-bird bag limit of 3.86 ducks per hunter. The highest average recorded during this period was 3.88 ducks/hunter during the 2000-2001 season.
- Coosawhatchie HP WMA hosted its first waterfowl lottery hunts since the Agency took ownership and management of the property in 2024. The season harvest average was 3.9 ducks per hunter, comprised predominantly of green-winged teal and wood ducks.
- Santee Delta East WMA recorded a 4.3 ducks per hunter average. This is the highest harvest average on this portion of the WMA since documentation by unit began here in 2005.
- Santee Coastal Reserve recorded the second highest harvest average of 4.3 since 1969 when the property was still under private ownership.
    - Murphy Island recorded its best year in documentation (since 2005), with a harvest average of 4.8 ducks per hunter.
    - The Cape recorded its second-best year in documentation (since 2005), with a harvest average of 4.0 ducks per hunter.
- Samworth WMA increased harvest for the second year in a row, recording a harvest average of 2.1 ducks per hunter. This exceeds the long-term harvest average of 1.7 ducks/hunter, dating back to the 1966-1967 season.

YOUTH WATERFOWL LOTTERY HUNTS

During the 2025-2026 waterfowl season, 17 youth waterfowl hunts were conducted through the Lottery Hunt Program and provided opportunities for 59 youth hunters. Bonneau Ferry WMA provided weekly hunting opportunities throughout the season, whereas Bear Island, Beaverdam Creek, Broad River, Clemson, Donnelley, Santee Coastal Reserve, Sandy Beach, and Wateree River HP WMAs provided opportunities on the first Federal Youth Waterfowl Hunting Day in February. Overall youth opportunity provided this season declined by 29% compared to the 2024-2025 season. This is due to a decline in the number of hunters drawn for Bonneau Ferry, as only one impoundment could be flooded there due to dry site conditions.

We observed a 100% participation rate for youth lottery waterfowl hunts for the 2025-2026 season. This was made possible due to parents of youth hunters notifying the Agency ahead of time when their youth would be unable to participate in a hunt, and due to the diligence of Lottery Hunt Coordinator Emily Kearse filling hunter vacancies from an alternate list.

The 2025-2026 ducks per youth hunter harvest average was 2.2, comparable to the 2.5 ducks per youth hunter average in 2024-2025. The top five species of harvest on youth hunts were wood ducks (23%), green-winged teal (16%), Northern shoveler (16%), Northern pintail (10%), and American wigeon (7%). Table 3 reports harvest composition and harvest averages for youth hunts by property for the 2025-26 season.





MIDWINTER AERIAL SURVEYS FOR WATERFOWL

In Winter 2026, SCDNR partnered with the USFWS to complete a mid-winter waterfowl survey on the following properties: Bear Island WMA, Samworth WMA, Sandy Beach WMA, Santee Coastal Reserve WMA, Santee Delta WMA, and the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center (hereafter, Yawkey). Surveys were also conducted on Cape Romain, Hollings-ACE Basin, Santee, and Savannah NWRs. USFWS pilots and biologists conducted the survey using USFWS aircraft equipped for overwater surveys. SCDNR Biologist Mark McAlister also participated in the survey to gain aerial survey experience and training.

Surveys were conducted on January 12, 14, and 16, 2026. An estimated 53,789 waterfowl were counted on SCDNR surveyed properties. Dabbling ducks (96%) comprised the majority of the estimates, followed by diving ducks (4%). Teal (combined green-winged and blue-winged teal; 38%), gadwall (25%), Northern pintail (15%), and Northern shoveler (14%) comprised most dabbling ducks. Ring-necked ducks (88%), hooded mergansers (7%), and bufflehead (5%) comprised the majority of diving ducks. Santee Coastal Reserve (72%) and Yawkey (25%) reported the highest waterfowl abundances. Estimates in 2026 were more similar to those obtained in 2024 when surveys were re-initiated with USFWS (**Figure 4**). Compared to 2025 results, total waterfowl abundance increased 54% and dabbling ducks increased 67%, however diving duck abundances decreased 45%. **Table 4** reports the abundance of waterfowl by WMA and guild as estimated during the survey.

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources will continue to partner with the USFWS to implement the mid-winter waterfowl survey in January 2027.

A complete history of mid-winter waterfowl surveys and current methodology can be found in the 2023-2024 Waterfowl Program Report: https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/waterfowl.html.

GROUND COUNT SURVEYS FOR WATERFOWL, 2025-2026

During the 2025-2026 waterfowl season, ground-based surveys were conducted to document the minimum abundance of waterfowl using lottery hunt properties throughout the waterfowl hunting season. Surveys were completed weekly, or once every two weeks as part of routine preparations for lottery waterfowl hunts. By integrating the surveys into pre-planned activities such as scouting or monitoring of water levels, staff were able to conduct surveys with no additional disturbance to hunted areas.

Counts were conducted on the following waterfowl areas: Beaverdam Creek, Bonneau Ferry, Broad River, Clemson, Coosawhatchie, Donnelley, Love Farm, Samworth, Sandy Beach, Santee Delta East and West, and Wateree River HP. Ground surveys were omitted from Bear Island and Santee Coastal Reserve WMAs due to the size and distribution of impoundments on these properties; Ground counts on these sites would create additional disturbance and have high potential for double counting waterfowl that flush between impoundments along survey routes. Therefore, abundance estimates for Bear Island and Santee Coastal Reserve were obtained through the MWS (see *Midwinter Aerial Surveys for Waterfowl*).

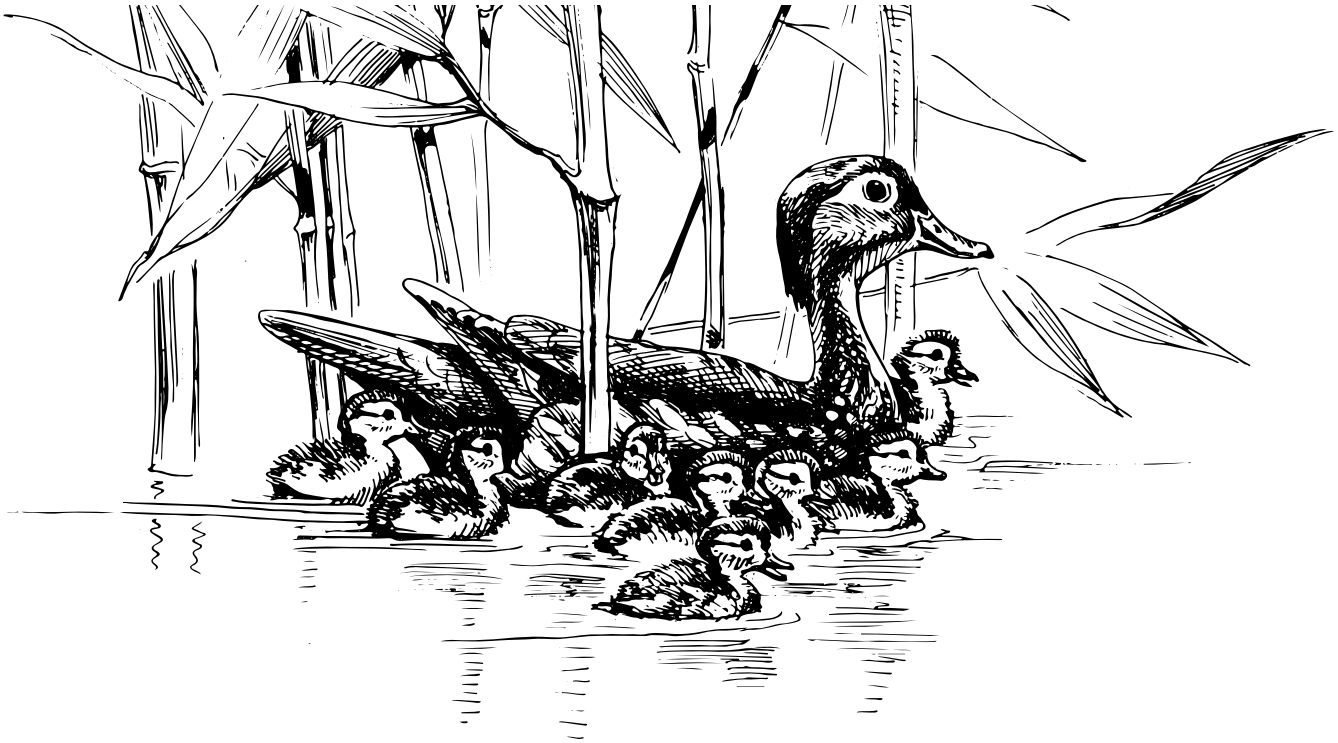
Ground surveys were initiated during the first week of December 2025 and continued through January 31, 2026. Staff were instructed to estimate the number of waterfowl that they could see on each managed wetland and to avoid intentionally flushing any waterfowl for the purpose of obtaining a complete count. Therefore, these counts are considered minimum abundance estimates for each area.

Over the nine-week survey period, 67 ground surveys were completed on 12 waterfowl areas. A total of 28,452 ducks were counted on the 12 waterfowl areas included in the survey. This is a 104% increase from the 2024-2025 ground count surveys (13,925). Abundances varied greatly by week and property (**Figure 5**).

These surveys will resume for the 2026-2027 waterfowl season.

MIGRATORY WATERFOWL PERMIT BUDGET & EXPENDITURES, FY26

The South Carolina Migratory Waterfowl Permit, commonly referred to as the "SC Duck Stamp" is a $15.50 licensing requirement for resident and non-resident waterfowl hunters in South Carolina. A 10% portion of annual permit revenue is allotted to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Fall Flight Program. This program is administered through Ducks Unlimited Canada where funding is used for the propagation, management, and protection of ducks and geese on breeding ground areas associated with waterfowl that winter in South Carolina. Beginning July 1, 2026, and for succeeding years, 20% of annual SC Duck Stamp permit revenue will be allotted to the Fall Flights Program. The remaining annual revenue generated from the purchase of the duck stamp is allocated to SCDNR specifically for the management of waterfowl habitats and for the development, protection, and propagation of wild waterfowl in South Carolina. Each year, in addition to annual budget requests, staff managing waterfowl properties request additional state duck stamp funding for special projects, habitat management, infrastructure improvements, and research on waterfowl areas. **Table 5** summarizes duck stamp funding requests and expenditures for FY26. Notable expenditures include: seed for habitat management that produced excellent stands of corn, Sudan sorghum, and millet at Coosawhatchie HP WMA (**Figure 6**), Clemson Waterfowl Area (**Figure 7**), and Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Area (**Figure 8**); removal of downed trees from Hurricane Helene in the Broad River Waterfowl Area Green Tree Reservoir (**Figure 9**); a new Marsh Master for management of moist soil impoundments on the Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project (**Figure 10**); Deer Buster Fencing to protect planted crops on Wateree River HP and Love Farm WMAs (**Figure 11**); a skid-steer for sediment removal from Beaverdam Creek and Clemson Waterfowl areas (**Figure 12**).





HABITAT ASSESSMENTS

Beginning in Fall 2023, habitat assessments were implemented to estimate the abundance and quality of food resources produced for waterfowl on Category 1 Waterfowl Areas. Standard, peer-reviewed methodologies were implemented on areas growing corn, rice, and moist soil plants to estimate waterfowl energy days (i.e. WEDs; a unit that measures how many waterfowl one acre of habitat can support for one day; Martin et al. 2023, Highway et al. 2024). By implementing these habitat assessments, SCDNR biologists and technicians can evaluate the effectiveness of wetland management activities and determine if properties are fulfilling the energetic demands of waterfowl wintering on SCDNR properties.

Beginning in Fall 2024, WED estimates were also generated for brackish and intermediate impounded marsh, green tree reservoirs, and planted millets and chufa. These habitat types or planted crops currently lack a standard field assessment for WED estimation. However, a literature review (Hagy et al. 2021) of peer-reviewed publications produced average values of energetic carrying capacity constants for the Southeast region based on habitat quality categories of low, moderate, or high. These carrying capacity constants, combined with the field assessment estimates for corn, rice, and moist soil plants, allow staff to produce a total, minimum WED estimate for all Category 1 waterfowl areas.

In Fall 2025, habitat assessments were completed on 11 Waterfowl Areas producing moist soil plants, corn, or rice. Additional WED estimates based on peer-reviewed publications of habitat carrying capacity constants were also calculated for 11 areas that produced brackish or intermediate marsh, agricultural millets or chufa, or had green tree reservoirs. Estimates produced should be considered minimum WEDs as all habitat resource types on SCDNR waterfowl areas were not included in the total estimate produced in 2025.

Across all sites (18,035 acres evaluated), SCDNR properties supplied a minimum of 28,133,139 WEDs, averaging 1,560 WEDs per acre that was evaluated. This can be interpreted as one acre of wetland habitat providing forage for 1,560 ducks for one day or can sustain one duck for 1,560 days. Given a 120-day winter season (November 1 through March 1), SCDNR waterfowl areas supply enough energy to support 234,443 ducks per day. Across all areas that were evaluated, each site and habitat types produced varying levels of WEDs (Table 6).

WMA INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATES: JULY 1, 2025 - JUNE 30, 2026

CATEGORY 1 WATERFOWL AREAS

BEAR ISLAND WMA – 4,844 acres, 45 miles of dike, 110 water control structures

BEAVERDAM CREEK WATERFOWL AREA – 30 acres, 0.75 miles of dikes, 2 water control structures, 1 pump

BONNEAU FERRY WMA – 200 acres, 2 miles of dike, 10 water control structures, 1 pump

BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA – 126 acres, 1.75 miles of dike, 7 water control structures, 2 pumps

CLEMSON WATERFOWL AREA – 20 acres, 0.4 miles of dikes, 1 water control structure, 2 pumps

COOSAWHATCHIE WMA – 101 acres, 3.9 miles of dike, 6 water control structures

DONNELLEY WMA – 2,118 acres, 8 miles of dike, 33 water control structures

SAMWORTH WMA – 968 acres, 16.6 miles of dikes, 24 water control structures (access by boat/barge only)

SANDY BEACH WATERFOWL AREA – 161 acres (including Stoney Bay), 2.2 miles of dike, 6 water control structures and one reversible pump

SANTEE COASTAL RESERVE WMA –

CEDAR ISLAND – 2,705 acres, 11.7 miles of dikes, 11 water control structures (access by boat/barge only)

MURPHY ISLAND – 5,580 acres, 15.6 miles of dikes, 14 water control structures (access by boat/barge only)

THE CAPE – 3,665 acres, 15.9 miles of dikes, 31 water control structures

SANTEE DELTA WMA (EAST & WEST) – 1,722 acres, 10 miles of dike, 13 water control structures

WATEREE RIVER (LOVE FARM) HP/WMA – 100 acres, 3.75 miles of dikes, 26 water control structures, 1 pump

SUMMARY OF CATEGORY 1 WATERFOWL AREA ACTIVITIES

- 616 miles of dike mowed
- 8 miles of dike re-topped with berm enhancement using long reach excavators
- 579 acres of soil disturbance (disking, rotovating, roller chopping) in impoundments
- 1,248 acres mowed in impoundments
- 1,071 acres burned in impoundments
- 1,400 acres sprayed with herbicide for noxious aquatic vegetation (i.e. white marsh, Phragmites, Cuban bulrush, etc.)
- 7 bulkheads were repaired/replaced
- 7 wooden trunks were repaired
- 5 water control structures were installed

MAJOR WEATHER EVENTS AND IMPACTS

DRY CONDITIONS, GROWING SEASON 2026

NOAA reports from January through June 2026 show precipitation ranked among the eight driest January to June periods in the 132-year record. The SC State Climatology Office's late-June station data show year to date deficits ranging from about 4 inches in the Upstate and Pee Dee to more than 11 inches along portions of the coast (South Carolina State Climatology Office, 2026). While these conditions can prove less than optimal for waterfowl areas growing planted crops, they have allowed for tractor access with soil disturbing implements to improve habitat in many areas.

COASTAL FLOOD EVENTS

In addition to the above-mentioned storms, Charleston Harbor recorded 46 King tides (tide of at least 6 feet, 6 inches above mean lower low water [MLLW]). On coastal Category 1 WMAs these high tide events cause erosion due to the over-topping of the dike systems. Under extreme and prolonged high tide conditions, additional water in impoundments cannot be easily removed. This makes managing native vegetation and planted crops challenging and can also delay infrastructure repairs (**Figure 13**).

ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS TO WATERFOWL AREAS

BONNEAU FERRY WMA: New Lake was converted from a fishing lake to a moist soil impoundment to benefit waterfowl. In Lake Emily, interior canals were reclaimed and mulched to clear of adjacent woody vegetation to facilitate better dewatering of this area for propagation of agricultural crops and moist soil vegetation (**Figure 14**).

BROAD RIVER WATERFOWL AREA: In the Green Tree Reservoir, downed and damaged trees from Hurricane Helene (2024) were removed to allow for open pockets and hardwood regeneration (**Figure 9**).

CEDAR ISLAND, SANTEE COASTAL RESERVE: In May 2026, work began to complete a multi-million-dollar renovation of the entire Cedar Island wetland complex. Work is estimated to take 14-16 months to complete (**Figure 15**).

COOSAWHATCHIE WMA: Dikes were reclaimed by mulching trees and woody vegetation around impoundments (**Figure 16**).

DONNELLEY WMA: Work continues to reduce invasive Cuban Bulrush in Big Backwater, a wetland area part of the Category 2 hunt program (**Figure 17**).

SAMWORTH WMA: Banana waterlily was planted in the Pullfare Impoundment (**Figure 18**).

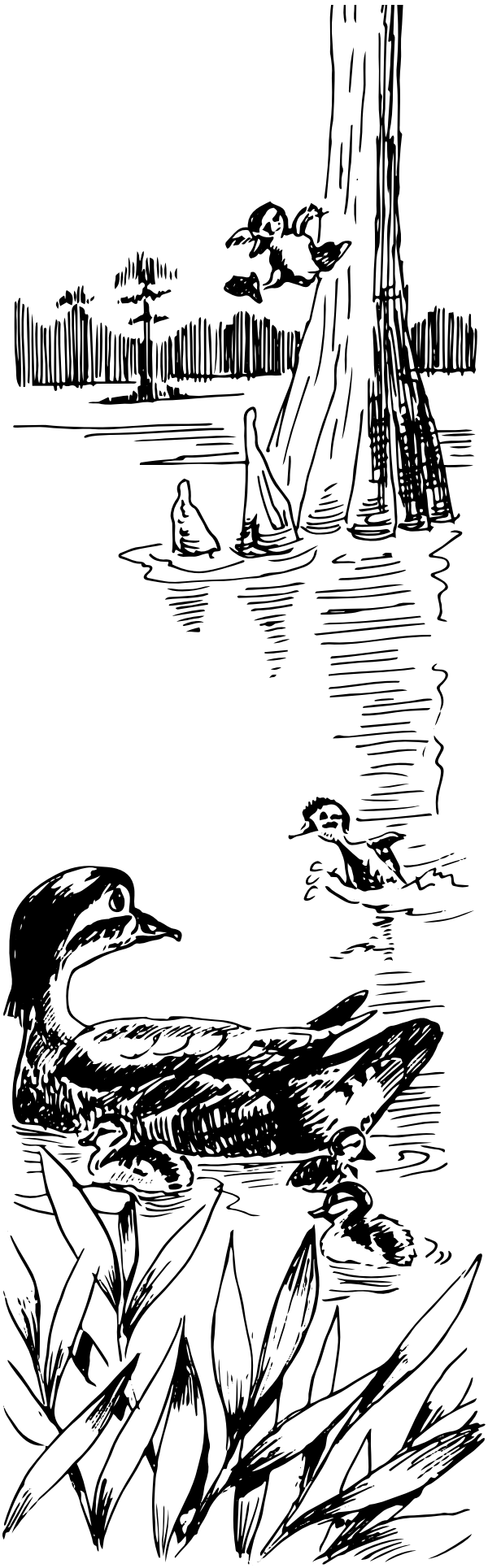
SANDY BEACH WMA: A high fence was completed around the Prairie unit to reduce damage to agricultural crops planted for waterfowl (**Figure 19**).

WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT AREA PEER REVIEWS

In 2021, SCDNR leadership developed and implemented the Waterfowl Management Area Peer Review Program as a proactive measure to critically evaluate all aspects of management on Category 1 Waterfowl Areas. Each evaluation is completed by a panel of nationally recognized wetland management experts. During the review process, these professionals are tasked with assessing and evaluating habitat management, infrastructure needs, and hunt management on a specific Category 1 area. Over a series of years, evaluations will be completed on all Category 1 areas. In fall 2027, a review panel will evaluate Bonneau Ferry WMA, Coosawhatchie HP WMA, and Sandy Beach Waterfowl Area.

To date, final reports have been produced for Samworth WMA (2022), Bear Island WMA (2023), Wateree HP WMA & Love Farm WMA (2024), Santee Coastal Reserve WMA (2024), Broad River Waterfowl Area (2026), and Beaverdam Creek and Clemson Waterfowl Areas (2026). Completed Waterfowl Management Area Peer Review reports can be found at: https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/waterfowl.html.





WOOD DUCK BOX PROGRAM

The wood duck is one of the most important species to South Carolina waterfowl enthusiasts and is the only duck we can effectively manage production habitat for throughout all geographic regions of the state. The Wood Duck Box Program was implemented in 1982 to increase wood duck production by providing artificial nest boxes to supplement natural cavities of forested wetlands. Since 1982, with funding support from the State Migratory Waterfowl Permit, the program has distributed a total 48,184 nest boxes for private landowners to install and maintain in wetlands across the state. This program is arguably one of the agency's most popular outreach programs to date.

In the fall of each year, using the Go Outdoors SC app, private landowners can apply for up to three wood duck nest boxes. Individuals are selected through a lottery and receive both box(es) and predator guard(s) that are distributed from select SCDNR offices in December and January of each year.

During the 2025 wood duck nesting season (January-September), 136 reports were voluntarily submitted via QR code affixed to the face of the SCDNR wood duck boxes. Voluntary reporting increased 36% from the previous season.

In early winter 2026-2027, we anticipate distribution of 1,200 new nest boxes and predator guards. Additional metal tags with QR codes will also be available to landowners desiring to add those to existing boxes.

A Wood Duck Box Program survey is planned for distribution in Winter 2026. The survey will gather information to make improvements to the program and lend guidance to the development of educational material for erecting, monitoring, and maintaining wood duck boxes.

EDUCATION, OUTREACH & SERVICE

SCDNR NATURAL RESOURCES FEST

The Waterfowl Program partnered with WMA staff from Regions 3 and 4 to participate in the first annual SCDNR Natural Resources Fest, an agencywide expo style event highlighting natural resources careers to school aged children. The event was attended by approximately 700 children and families. The Waterfowl Program and WMA staff conducted two rocket net demonstrations, assembled a collection of waterfowl banding equipment, and a duck taxidermy mount for display. Staff from the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center also brought a rice trunk replica to display. Exhibits and demonstrations were used to generate discussion and teach skills to generate interest in careers in waterfowl science and wetland management.

SOUTH CAROLINA DUCK SUMMIT

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Waterfowl Program and partners hosted the "South Carolina Duck Summit" at the South Carolina Waterfowl Association (SCWA). This was a public meeting involving representation from SCWA, USFWS, Nemours Wildlife Foundation, Clemson University, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, private landowners, public waterfowl hunters, the Waterfowl Advisory Committee, and legislators from the House and Senate (**Figure 20**). The event provided panel-style and group discussions to gather opinions on habitat and hunt management challenges from both government, private, and public hunter perspectives. Biologist Molly Kneece presented information on habitat types and management of Category 1 waterfowl areas, how much duck food Category 1 areas provide, habitat assessments, lottery hunt numbers, and lottery hunt harvest totals and trends. A summary of the Summit can be found at: https://www.dnr.sc.gov/hunting/waterfowl.html.

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE WINGBEE

Every year a sample group of waterfowl hunters from across the nation is asked to participate in the USFWS Parts Collection Survey (PCS). In this survey, selected hunters are asked to collect a wing from each duck and specified feathers from each goose they harvest during the season. Parts are submitted to the USFWS in pre-paid envelopes and stored in freezers until the conclusion of the season. Each year 15,000-20,000 duck wings and goose parts are submitted to USFWS from the Atlantic Flyway alone. Over the course of a week, USFWS and state biologists and technicians sort and examine each part submitted to determine the species, age, and sex composition of the annual waterfowl harvest. This information is critical for harvest management decision of subsequent waterfowl seasons.

Since 2023, SCDNR has sent biologists and technicians to participate in the Atlantic Flyway Wingbee at the Patuxent National Wildlife Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland. At the event, staff gain valuable experience learning to determine species, age and sex of multiple species of waterfowl only using duck wings, and goose wingtips and tail feathers (**Figure 21**). Staff bring this training back to South Carolina and can help others sharpen their skills, ensuring data quality in aging and sexing of ducks for the state waterfowl banding program. The Waterfowl Program would like to thank the following SCDNR staff for their contributions to the USFWS Parts Collection Survey Wingbee: Joseph Woods (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026), Zoey Thomas (2024, 2025, 2026), Caroline Guerry (2024, 2025, 2026), Jason Deavers (2025, 2026), Ashleigh Benton (2023), Matt Smith (2023), and Jake Merendino (2023).



PROPERTY HIGHLIGHT

BONNEAU FERRY WMA

Bonneau Ferry WMA was acquired from MeadWestvaco in 2004. Since acquisition of the 10,700-acre property, Technician Tom Harkins has overseen management of the area. With an emphasis on youth hunting opportunities, Bonneau Ferry WMA has become a highly sought-after destination for youth waterfowl hunters.

Waterfowl habitat management on the property includes planting and flooding agricultural crops, managing moist-soil wetlands, and promoting submerged aquatic vegetation in the numerous lakes across the property. This diversity of habitats attracts a variety of waterfowl, from dabbling ducks such as teal and wood ducks, and diving ducks such as ring-necked ducks. Youth hunters at Bonneau Ferry are provided with opportunities to encounter and harvest a variety of species.

From the 2004–2005 through the 2013–2014 waterfowl season, both youth hunters and their accompanying adults were selected through a lottery and permitted to hunt. Under this format, 492 hunters harvested 1,671 ducks, averaging 3.4 ducks per hunter. Since then, hunting has been limited to youth hunters selected through the lottery. Adults accompany youth participants but do not hunt. Under the youth-only format, 580 youth hunters have harvested 1,483 ducks, averaging 2.6 ducks per hunter.

Bonneau Ferry WMA also hosts annual waterfowl hunts through SCDNR's Take One Make One program, which introduces first time youth hunters to hunting. Together, these programs provide quality waterfowl hunting opportunities while helping develop the next generation of South Carolina hunters.

Many youth hunters have harvested their first duck at Bonneau Ferry WMA. Now, more than two decades after the property opened as a WMA, some adults who hunted there as youth are returning with their own children. For these families, watching a child harvest a first duck on the same property where a parent experienced that milestone years earlier makes Bonneau Ferry a particularly meaningful place.

Tom and his staff continue to enhance habitat and the quality of the hunting experience at Bonneau Ferry WMA. Over the years, these efforts have included securing North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant funding to improve impoundments, seeking outside expertise to strengthen habitat management, and incorporating innovative tools such as drones into management activities. Most importantly, the attention to detail and commitment demonstrated by Tom and his staff have helped distinguish Bonneau Ferry as a premier youth waterfowl hunting destination.

The property also contributes to SCDNR's waterfowl monitoring and research efforts. Each year, Tom and his staff capture and band numerous wood ducks using rocket nets and airboats. Banding and recovery data provide SCDNR biologists with important information used to estimate harvest and survival rates and better understand South Carolina's wood duck population.

Through Tom's leadership, attention to detail, and commitment to wildlife management and youth hunting, Bonneau Ferry WMA has provided generations of young South Carolina hunters with opportunities and experiences that can last a lifetime.

TABLES

TABLE 1. *SCDNR Category 1 Lottery Waterfowl Hunt participation by WMA during the 2025–2026 waterfowl season.*

WMA	# of Hunts Scheduled	# Hunters Selected by Lottery	# Hunters that Participated	% Participation
Bear Island	17	317	279	88%
Beaverdam	7	55	47	85%
Broad River	8	88	85	97%
Clemson	7	28	17	61%
Coosawhatchie	4	16	15	94%
Donnelley	8	45	36	80%
Samworth	4	21	17	81%
Sandy Beach	6	20	17	100%
Santee Delta - East	7	53	46	87%
Santee Delta - West	7	40	34	85%
SCR - Cape	8	128	125	98%
SCR - Cedar	8	93	86	92%
SCR - Murphy	10	175	173	99%
Wateree	7	24	23	96%
ALL SITES	**108**	**1,103**	**1,003**	**91%**

TABLE 2. Harvest statistics for SCDNR Category 1 Lottery Waterfowl Hunts during the 2025–2026 waterfowl season

2024-2025	BEAR ISLAND	BEAVERDAM	BROAD RIVER	CLEMSON	COOSAWHATCHIE	DONNELLY	SAMWORTH	SANDY BEACH	SANTEE DELTA - EAST	SANTEE DELTA - WEST	SANTEE DELTA TOTAL	SCR THE CAPE	SCR CEDAR ISL	SCR MURPHY	SCR TOTAL	WATEREE	CATEGORY 1 TOTAL
Mallard	10	14	64	1		1		3	3	2	5	2	1	4	7		105
Dom/Rel Mallard	2	11			1	1											15
Black Duck	2		4						1	1	2	3	1	7	11		19
Mallard x Black	1	1															2
Mottled Duck	48					10			5		5	13	7	30	50		113
Gadwall	88		13			1	1	6	4		4	120	23	102	245		358
American Wigeon	4		3					1				40	2	173	215		223
Green-winged Teal	123	8	54		34	16	8	17	118	14	132	196	211	196	603	5	1000
Blue-winged Teal	65					14			34	2	36	51	14	41	106		221
Northern Shoveler	51		1		2	1			19		19	53	51	83	187		261
Northern Pintail	7		3		1				7		7	113	23	165	301		319
Wood Duck	20	22	27	12	11	77	24	30	1	39	40			1	1	36	300
Redhead																	
Canvasback																	
Scaup	5		2									4		6	10		17
Ring-necked Duck	3		37		1	2						7		1	8		51
Golden-eye																	
Bufflehead	24											1		5	6		30
Ruddy Duck	8											1		3	4		12
Tree ducks																	
Sea ducks																	
Canada Goose																	
Snow Goose	2													2	2		4
Coot	31								2		2						33
Mergansers	20	1	3		8	16	2	1	4	12	16	3		13	16	4	87
TOTAL HARVEST	**514**	**57**	**211**	**13**	**58**	**139**	**35**	**58**	**198**	**70**	**268**	**607**	**333**	**832**	**1,772**	**45**	**3,170**
# HUNTERS	**279**	**47**	**85**	**17**	**15**	**36**	**17**	**20**	**46**	**34**	**80**	**125**	**86**	**173**	**384**	**23**	**1,003**
DUCKS/ HUNTER	**1.8**	**1.2**	**2.5**	**0.8**	**3.9**	**3.9**	**2.1**	**2.9**	**4.3**	**2.1**	**3.4**	**4.9**	**3.9**	**4.8**	**4.6**	**2.0**	**3.2**
SHOTS FIRED	**2,788**	**630**	**1,232**	**102**	**333**	**640**	**122**	**314**	**815**	**374**	**1,189**	**2,511**	**1,473**	**3,440**	**7,424**	**343**	**15,117**
% CRIPPLING LOST	**17%**	**37%**	**19%**	**7%**	**25%**	**16%**	**13%**	**17%**	**11%**	**20%**	**14%**	**9%**	**11%**	**10%**	**10%**	**20%**	**14%**

__TABLE 3.__ Harvest statistics for SCDNR Youth Category 1 Lottery Waterfowl Hunts during the 2025–2026 waterfowl season.

2025-2026	BEAR ISLAND	BEAVERDAM	BONNEAU FERRY	BROAD RIVER	CLEMSON	DONNELLY	SANDY BEACH	SCR - CAPE	SCR - MURPHY ISLAND	SCR TOTAL	WATEREE	CATEGORY 1 TOTAL
Mallard		1		2	1		1					5
Dom/Rel Mallard												
Black Duck												
Mallard x Black												
Mottled Duck	4								1	1		5
Gadwall	6			1				1		1		8
American Wigeon	1			1					7	7		9
Green-winged Teal	2		4			2		10	2	12		20
Blue-winged Teal	3					3			1	1		7
Northern Shoveler	11							4	6	10		21
Northern Pintail								11	2	13		13
Wood Duck		1	24			4					1	30
Redhead												
Canvasback												
Scaup												
Ring-necked Duck				2		1						3
Golden-eye												
Bufflehead									1	1		1
Ruddy Duck												
Tree ducks												
Sea ducks												
Canada Goose												
Snow Goose												
Coot	1								2	2		3
Mergansers	2		2									4
TOTAL HARVEST	**30**	**2**	**30**	**6**	**1**	**10**	**1**	**26**	**22**	**48**	**1**	**129**
# HUNTERS	**9**	**3**	**17**	**2**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**8**	**10**	**18**	**2**	**59**
DUCKS/HUNTER	**3.3**	**0.7**	**1.8**	**3.0**	**0.3**	**3.3**	**1.0**	**3.3**	**2.2**	**2.7**	**0.5**	**2.2**
SHOTS FIRED	**143**	**29**	**262**	**49**	**10**	**61**	**19**	**158**	**135**	**293**	**14**	**880**

TABLE 4. *Waterfowl abundance by WMA and guild estimated from aerial surveys conducted January 12, 14, and 16, 2026.*

WMA	DABBLING DUCKS	DIVING DUCKS	GEESE	SWANS	CRANES	TOTAL WATERFOWL
Yawkey	13,056	292	0	0	0	13,349
Samworth	3	136	0	0	0	139
Santee Coastal	37,993	996	0	0	0	38,349
Santee Delta	336	0	0	0	0	336
Sandy Beach	53	9	0	0	0	62
Bear Island	236	808	0	0	0	1,213
TOTAL	**51,677**	**2,211**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**53,789**

TABLE 5. *Summary of FY26 SCDNR Waterfowl Permit (Duck Stamp) funding requests and expenditures.*

DESCRIPTION OF REQUEST	BUDGET	EXPENDED	% EXPENDED
Statewide Wood Duck Box Project	$100,000	$98,370	98%
Midwinter Aerial Surveys	$14,000	$6,287	52%
Control of Undesirable Vegetation	$45,000	$0	0%
Atlantic Flyway Council Banding Assessment and Dues	$11,500	$11,435	99%
Habitat Management: Plantings, Maintenance, and Equipment	$651,700	$265,221	41%
AFWA Fall Flights Program (Contribution to DU Canada)	$126,327	$126,327	100%
SUMMARY FY26	**$948,527**	**$507,640**	**54%**

TABLE 6. *Estimated Waterfowl Energy Day (WED) production by site on SCDNR Waterfowl Areas, fall 2025.*

Site	2025 Total WEDs	WED/120 Days = Ducks per Day
Bear Island	5,192,305	43,269
Bonneau Ferry	494,261	4,119
Broad River	233,460	1,946
Coosawhatchie	192,522	1,604
Donnelly	962,203	8,018
Love Farm	306,974	2,558
Samworth	936,692	7,806
Sandy Beach	478,995	3,992
SCR	17,856,000	148,800
Santee Delta - East	1,027,962	8,566
Santee Delta - West	331,326	2,761
Wateree River	120,439	1,004
TOTAL	**28,133,139**	**234,443**

FIGURES

FIGURE 1. *Movements of 26 female mallards outfitted with GPS transmitters in South Carolina during February 2022, 2023, 2025, and 2026. Tracks depict movements recorded from January 2022 through August 2026.*

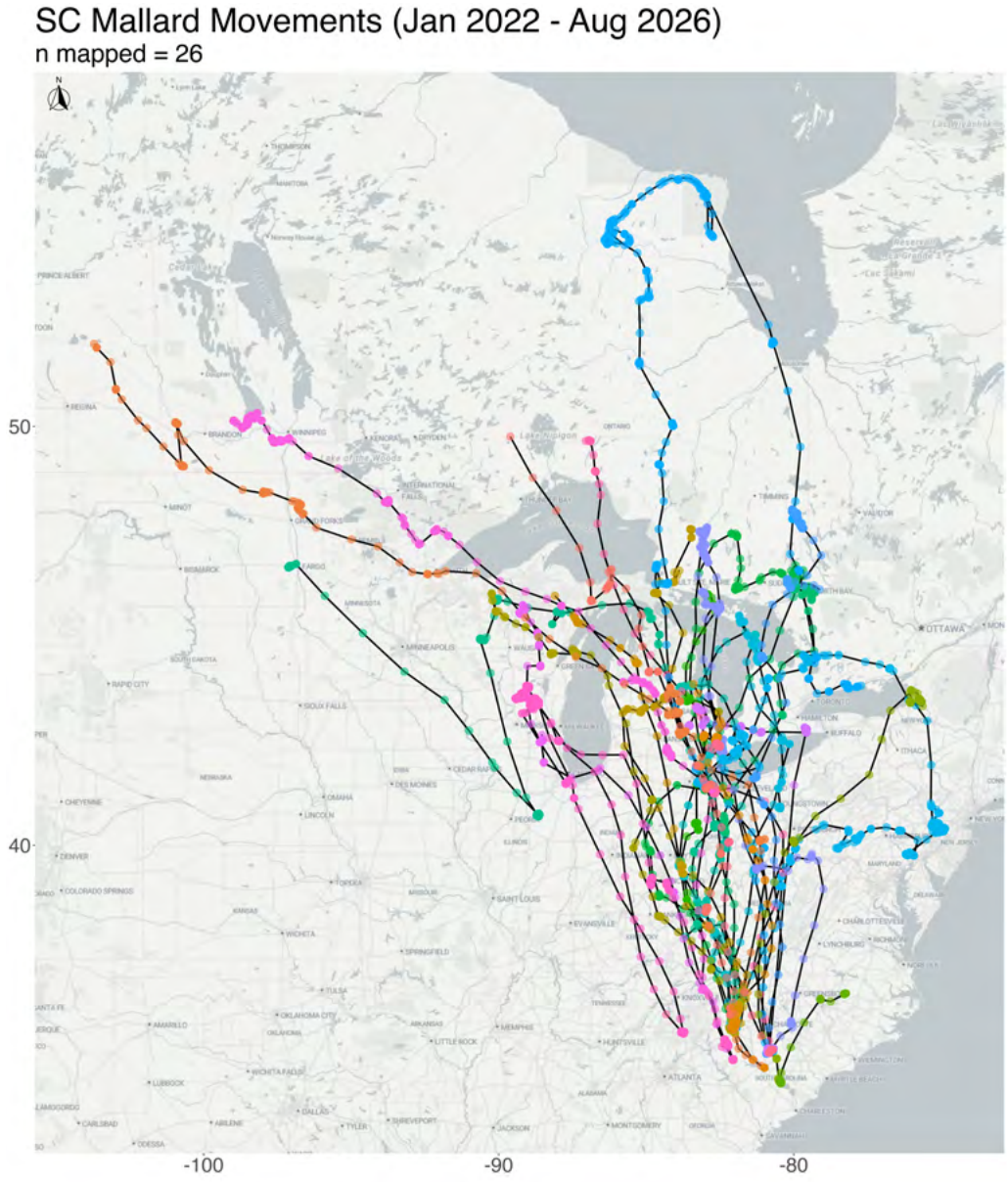


FIGURE 2. *Long-term average number of ducks harvested per hunter at SCDNR Category 1 Lottery Waterfowl Hunt properties under a six-duck daily bag limit, 1998–1999 through 2025-2026.*

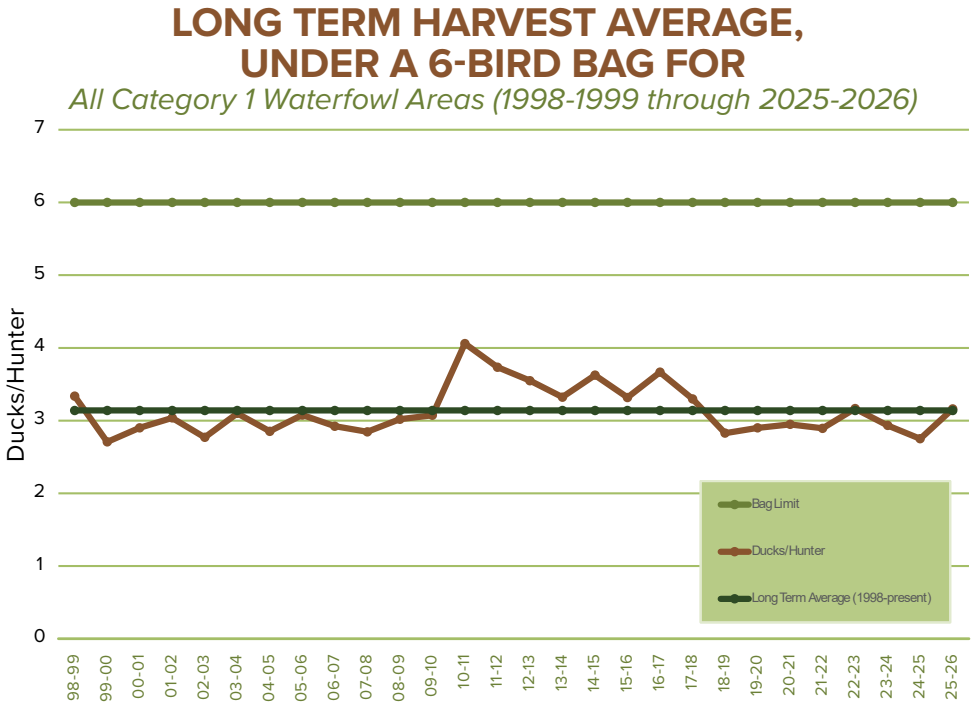


FIGURE 3. *Comparison of average ducks harvested per hunter during the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 waterfowl seasons across all Category 1 Lottery Waterfowl Hunt locations.*

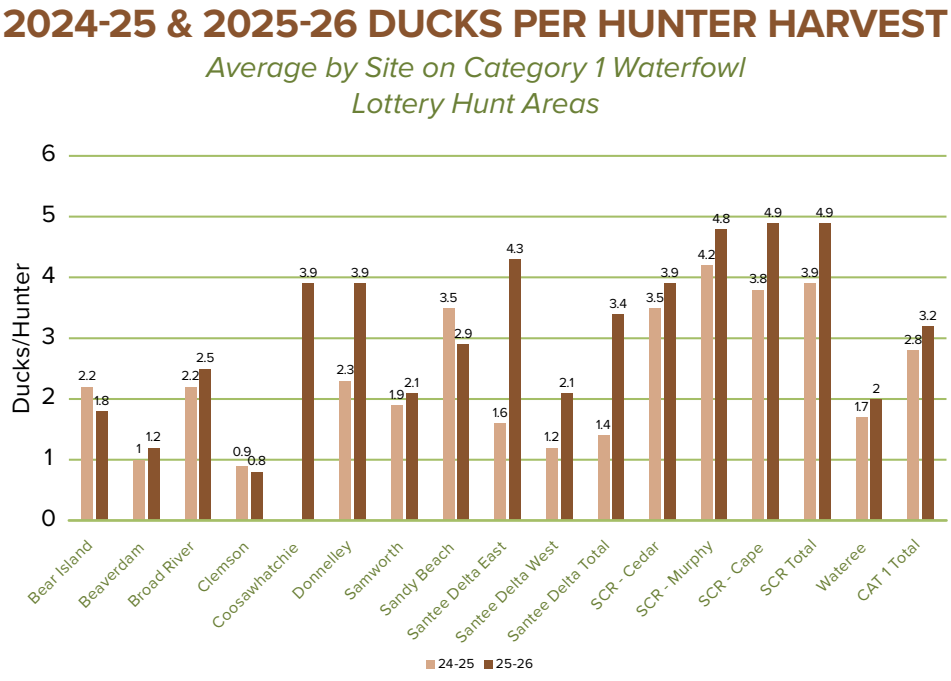


FIGURE 4. *Comparison of total waterfowl abundance estimated during January midwinter aerial waterfowl surveys conducted from 2024–2026 at Bear Island, Samworth, Sandy Beach, Santee Delta, and Santee Coastal Reserve WMAs and the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center.*

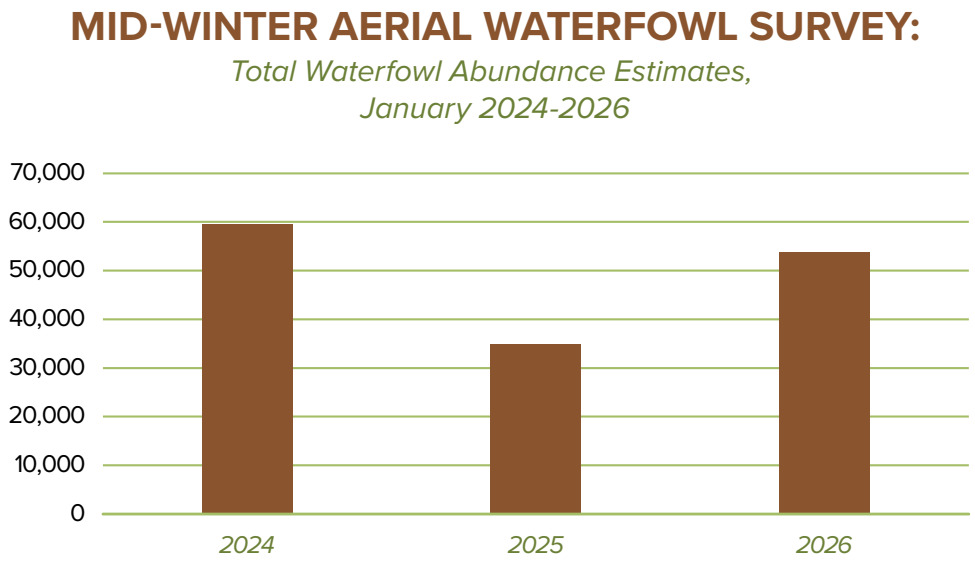
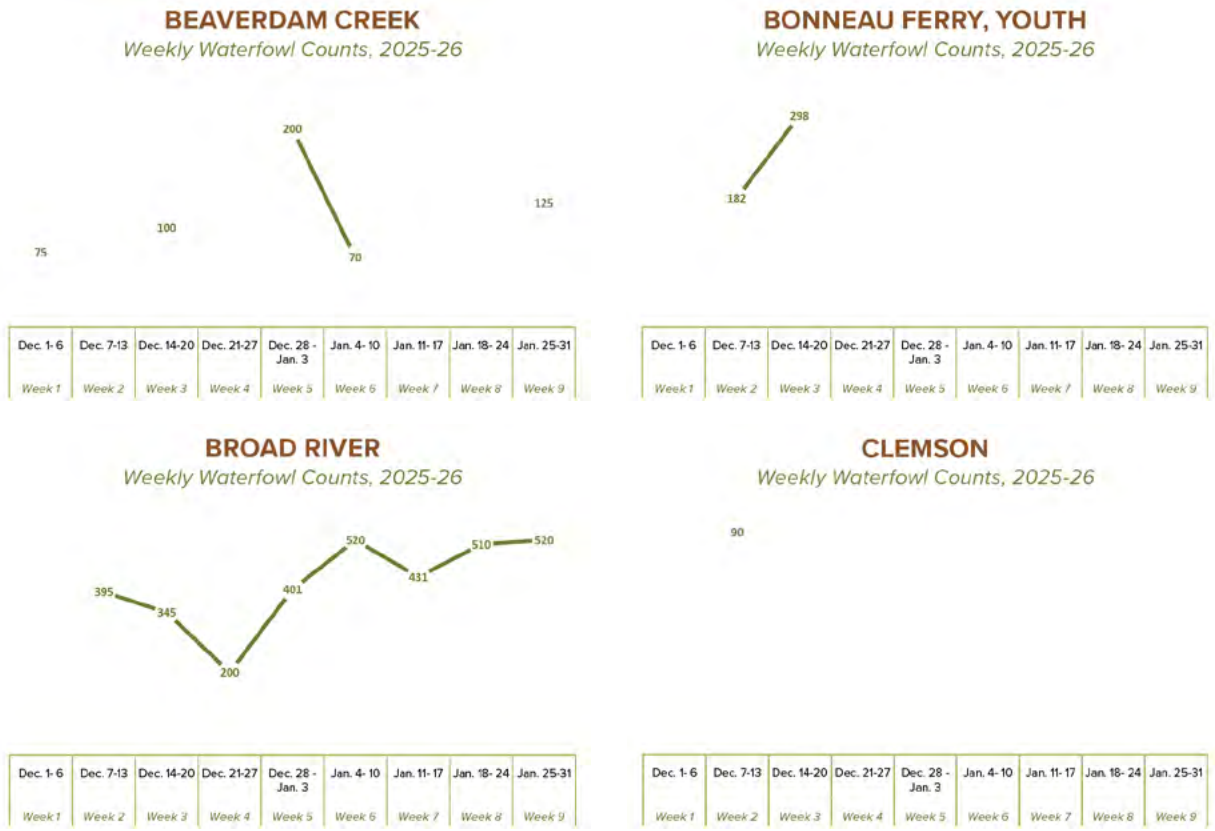


FIGURE 5. *Weekly waterfowl abundance based on ground counts conducted at 12 SCDNR Waterfowl Areas during the 2025–2026 season. Counts represent minimum observed abundance because staff avoided flushing birds to obtain complete counts, thereby minimizing disturbance at survey sites.*



COOSAWHATCHIE

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



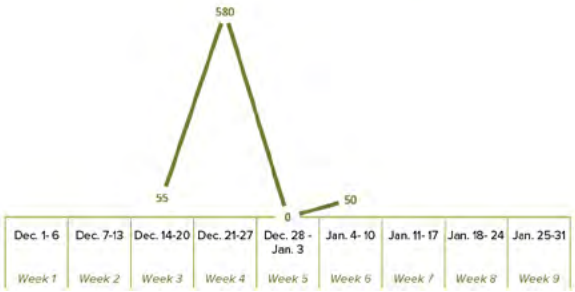
DONNELLEY

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



LOVE FARM

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



SAMWORTH

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



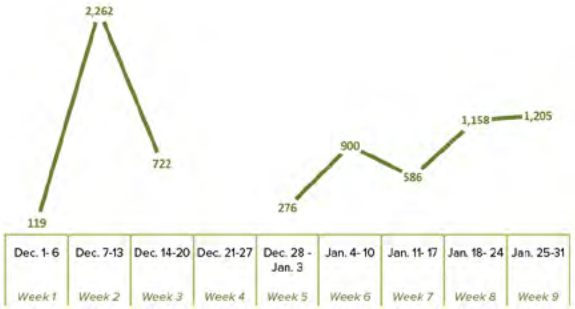
SANDY BEACH

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



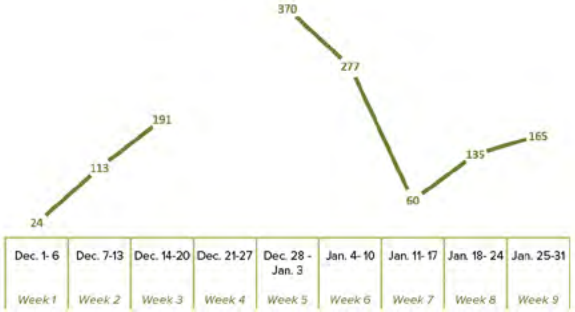
SANTEE DELTA EAST

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



SANTEE DELTA WEST

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



WATEREE

Weekly Waterfowl Counts, 2025-26



FIGURE 6. *Seed purchased with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds produced successful crops interspersed with beneficial moist-soil vegetation in waterfowl impoundments on Coosawhatchie HP WMA.*



FIGURE 7. *Growing millet, Sudan sorghum, and corn from seed purchased with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds provide forage for waterfowl and support lottery waterfowl hunts at Clemson Waterfowl Area.*



FIGURE 8. *Millet established from seed purchased with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds provides forage for waterfowl and supports lottery waterfowl hunts at Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Area.*



FIGURE 9. *Trees downed by Hurricane Helene were removed from the Broad River Waterfowl Area Green Tree Reservoir to create canopy and forest-floor openings and improve habitat conditions. Work was funded with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds.*





FIGURE 10. *A new Marsh Master was purchased with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds to improve access to wetland areas inaccessible by tractor and enhance wetland management capabilities on Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project properties, including Santee Coastal Reserve, Santee Delta, and Samworth WMAs.*



FIGURE 11. *Additional fencing was installed at Wateree River HP and Love Farm WMAs to reduce deer damage to crops planted for waterfowl. Improvements were funded with FY26 SC Duck Stamp funds.*





FIGURE 12. *A new skid steer was purchased with FY26 SC Duck Stamp Funds to complete dike repairs and sediment removal following flash flood events on Beaverdam Creek and Clemson Waterfowl Area.*



FIGURE 13. *Routine impacts from a King Tide flooding the boat ramp road at Santee Coastal Reserve.*



FIGURE 14. *Bonneau Ferry WMA staff worked to improve planting conditions by mulching woody vegetation adjacent to drainage ditches and cleaning out ditches in Lake Emily (1). New Lake was converted from a fishing lake to a moist soil management unit to increase waterfowl management on the property (2).*





FIGURE 15. *Renovation of the Cedar Island wetland complex on Santee Coastal Reserve WMA began in May 2026. The multi-million-dollar project is expected to take approximately 14 to 16 months to complete.*





FIGURE 16. *Dikes surrounding impoundments on Coosawhatchie HP WMA were reclaimed by mulching trees and woody vegetation to maintain the structural integrity of the impoundment dike system.*





FIGURE 17. *Big Backwater on Donnelley WMA, part of the Category 2 Waterfowl Hunt Program, was drained and prescribed burned in spring 2026 to control invasive Cuban bulrush and promote beneficial moist-soil vegetation.*



FIGURE 18. *Banana waterlily planted within protective enclosures in the Pullfare Impoundment, Samworth WMA. Enclosures were used to reduce herbivory by turtles and promote establishment and subsequent propagation throughout the impoundment. Enclosures designated by the white boxes in the images.*



FIGURE 19. *A high fence was constructed around the Prairie Unit on Sandy Beach Waterfowl Area to reduce white-tailed deer damage to agricultural crops planted for waterfowl.*



FIGURE 20. *The SCDNR Waterfowl Program and partners hosted the South Carolina Duck Summit at the South Carolina Waterfowl Association. This public meeting brought together representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nemours Wildlife Foundation, Clemson University, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, private landowners, public waterfowl hunters, the SCDNR Waterfowl Advisory Committee, and members of the South Carolina House and Senate.*



FIGURE 21. *SCDNR staff Jason Deavers and Caroline Dawkins determine the species, age, and sex of duck wings at the USFWS Wingbee at Patuxent National Wildlife Research Refuge.*





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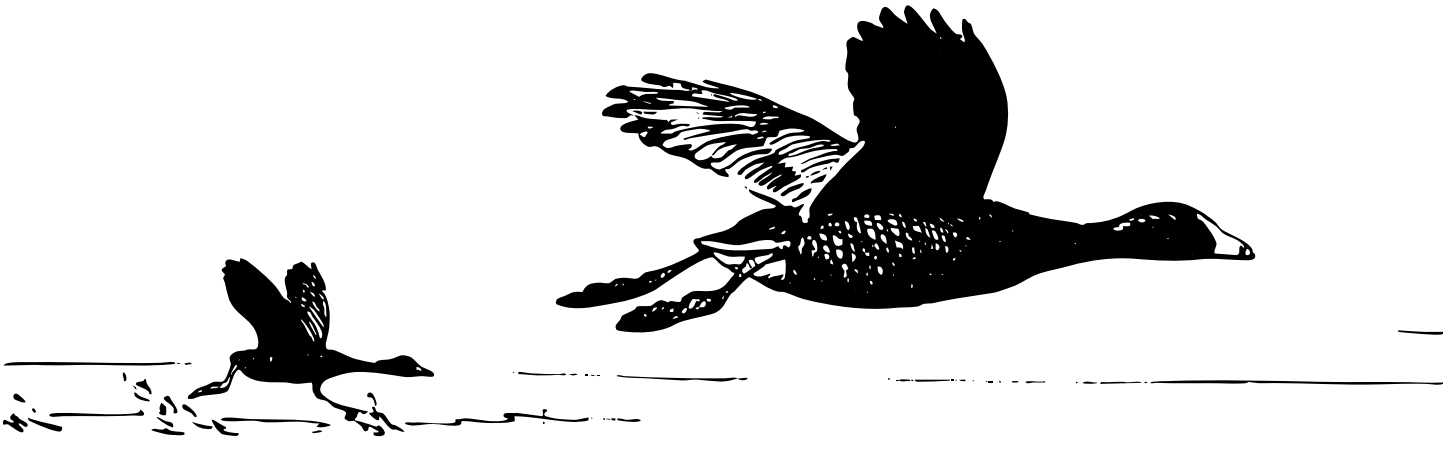
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