

## NDG&F June 30th Newsletter

### Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest

The deadline for submitting photos to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual [Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest](#) is Sept. 30.

The contest has categories for non-game and game species, as well as plants/insects. An overall winning photograph will be chosen, with the number of place winners in each category determined by the number of qualified entries.

Contest entries are limited to digital files submitted on disk or via email. Contestants are limited to no more than five entries. Photos must have been taken in North Dakota.

By submitting an entry, photographers grant permission to Game and Fish to publish winning photographs in North Dakota OUTDOORS magazine, and on the Department's website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Photo disks should be sent to Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest, C/O Patrick T. Isakson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, 100 N. Bismarck Expressway, Bismarck, ND 58501-5095.

Send emailed digital photos to [photocontest@nd.gov](mailto:photocontest@nd.gov). Photographers will need to supply the original image if needed for publication.

Photo disks will not be returned. All entries must be accompanied by the photographer's name, address, phone number and email address if available. Other information such as photo site location and month taken are also useful.

### Spring Breeding Duck Numbers Tallied

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual spring breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 4.9 million birds, up 23 percent from last year and 110 percent above the long-term average (1948-2013).

Mike Szymanski, waterfowl biologist, said all species increased from their 2013 estimates, except canvasbacks (down 7.9 percent, but still 41 percent above long-term) and ruddy ducks (down 1.2 percent). Redheads (+64 percent), green-winged teal (+42 percent), blue-winged teal (+34 percent), wigeon (+33 percent) and scaup (+28 percent) showed the largest increases. Mallards and blue-wings were the most abundant ducks on the survey, combining for 48 percent of the total.

"Some of the later nesting dabbling duck species, such as blue-wings and shovelers, were just settling into breeding areas so their counts may have been biased slightly high this year, simply because of a cold spring and their migration lagging behind other birds," Szymanski said. "Mallards, an early nesting species, were well into nesting and settled on breeding areas. Diving ducks pushed through the state well ahead of the survey, so we feel good about those numbers."

Duck numbers during the last two decades are the highest since survey records began in 1948.

Szymanski said abundant water and good nesting cover have kept breeding duck numbers high. "It's pretty amazing to see the top 20 breeding duck indices have all come in the past 20 years," he added.

"We had Conservation Reserve Program acres on the landscape, and then water came in a big way. It's safe to say we are still riding abundant populations stemming from near perfect conditions. It's hard to say how they will fair in the future now that a large portion of their nesting cover has disappeared

through CRP expirations.”

The spring water index increased 110 percent from 2013. The water index is based on basins with water, and does not necessarily represent the amount of water contained in wetlands or the type of wetlands represented.

“This year’s water index was strongly influenced by small ephemeral waters and an abundance of ditches with water,” Szymanski said. “Water conditions were good in most wetlands that ducks will use for brood rearing.”

Szymanski said water was more abundant in the northwest and northeast portions of the state. In addition, he said western North Dakota was wetter than average.

“Breeding conditions on the prairies can always change in a hurry,” Szymanski said. “Last year, conditions were looking OK when we conducted the survey, but there was some question as to whether it would dry out prior to brood rearing. Then several inches of rain fell and wetlands used for brood rearing improved. This year, conditions are looking better in those wetlands, but a hot and dry spell could change that.”

The loss of CRP acres was evident during the survey, Szymanski said, as large stretches of land conversion to cropland were obvious. “The loss of grass will hurt production of ducks and other grassland nesting birds,” he added. “However, the recent overly wet conditions are helping bridge the gap a little bit for ducks.”

Szymanski said having a lot of pairs present in May is a good thing. However, the July brood survey will provide a better idea of duck production and insight into expectations for this fall.