

Breeding ducks increase by 30 Percent in annual CDFW Waterfowl Population Survey

July 29, 2023



The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) has completed its 2023 waterfowl breeding population survey. The resulting data indicate the overall number of breeding ducks has increased by 30 percent with mallards as the most abundant duck in the survey.

“Survey estimates indicated a 13 percent increase in mallard abundance. Habitat conditions improved somewhat as there was more surface water encountered across the survey area than in previous years,” said CDFW’s Waterfowl Program Biologist Melanie Weaver.

The full Breeding Population Survey Report, available on the CDFW website, indicates the total number of ducks (all species combined) increased from 379,870 in 2022 to 495,438 this year.

This estimate is 8 percent below the long-term average. The estimated breeding population of mallards increased from 179,390 in 2022 to 202,108 this year, while also below their long-term average. The long-term declines are largely attributed to the loss of nesting habitat for ducks. Additionally, the impact of drought conditions have likely exacerbated these declines.

CDFW biologists and warden pilots have conducted this survey annually using fixed-wing aircraft since 1948. The population estimates are for those areas where the vast majority of waterfowl nesting occurs in

California, including wetland and agricultural areas in northeastern California, throughout the Central Valley, the Suisun Marsh and some coastal valleys.

The majority of California's wintering duck population originates from breeding areas surveyed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in Alaska and Canada, and these results should be available by August. CDFW survey information, along with similar data from other Pacific Flyway states, is used by the USFWS and the Pacific Flyway Council when setting hunting regulations for the Pacific Flyway states, including California.