

Media release

Wednesday, 14 April 2021

Helicopter survey provides new data on Victoria's game ducks

A pilot aerial survey to estimate the total number of game ducks in Victoria was released today by the Game Management Authority.

The aerial survey found an estimated total population of almost 2.5 million game ducks, giving a more detailed understanding of the number of game ducks in the state. This number is much higher than previous methodologies have indicated and means that the sustainable harvest level can be increased.

The aerial survey was conducted by experienced wildlife consultants counting the number of game ducks from a helicopter, on over 650 waterbodies including wetlands and farm dams. Satellite imagery was then used to determine the amount of water in the landscape and the actual number of ducks counted was then multiplied to estimate the total number of ducks present at that time.

Prior to this, the Eastern Australian Waterbird Survey has been used for setting duck season arrangements for nearly 40 years, but it only estimates from a proportion of the total population. A team of researchers fly in a fixed-wing aircraft along ten survey bands stretching from central Queensland down to southern Victoria, counting over 50 species of waterbirds on up to 2,000 wetlands.

The new helicopter survey is the largest and most comprehensive aerial survey of game ducks undertaken in Victoria and the first time that an accurate estimate of the total number of game ducks has been possible. Other surveys have provided an index of abundance showing trends over time rather than a total estimate.

The aerial survey was conducted in November 2020 as a pilot study to test the effectiveness of a new monitoring program design.

An evaluation of the monitoring program, conducted by the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, has found that the aerial survey is an effective way of counting ducks – providing critical data to ensure that duck season arrangements remain sustainable.

It is envisaged that this new monitoring program will inform adaptive harvest management – delivering on a key action in the Victorian Government's Sustainable Hunting Action Plan.

With this new data now available, modifications have been made to the previously announced 2021 duck season arrangements. This includes increasing the bag limit from two to five game ducks per day and removing the geographic restriction on hunting teal species. Other details for the 2021 season remain the same.

The 2021 season will start on Wednesday 26 May 2021 and will last 20 days, closing 30 minutes after sunset on Monday 14 June 2021. Hunting start times will be delayed until 8:00 am for the first five days of the season from Wednesday 26 May to Sunday 30 May inclusive.

As in previous years, the GMA will continue to monitor conditions in the lead up to and during the season. Where warranted, wetlands may be closed to hunting to protect concentrations of rare threatened species.

The GMA and partner agencies, including Victoria Police, will be patrolling both public lands and private properties to ensure compliance with hunting, animal welfare and public safety laws.

For more information, on the aerial survey report and changes to 2021 duck season arrangements visit gma.vic.gov.au

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