WATERFOWL: Marshes of Lower Delta great for ducks

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ducks can eat them throughout the season.

“That dry spell was both good and bad for ducks,” Knight opined. “Places that would typically retain water had some different and more diverse species grow up more abundantly.”

Woodies habitually fly at first light, or even before, and regularly follow the same flight patterns each day between their roosting, feeding and resting areas. Wood ducks don’t respond to decoys or calling as well as other ducks. They just go where they want and crash-land wherever they feel like it. If waterfowlers can find where woodies want to go, they can enjoy fast, but brief action. The morning flight might only last 10 to 15 minutes and usually ends before the sun cracks the horizon.

“Wood ducks are usually our number one species harvested across the state,” stated Seth Maddox, state Wildlife Section assistant chief. “They are here all year long, but we get an influx of birds from farther north when a cold front hits.”

The marshes of the Lower Delta offer some of the best waterfowl habitat in the state, particularly in South Alabama. Waterfowlers might bag any duck species that passes through Alabama in those marshes.

“The delta is as good as it gets in Alabama,” Knight confirmed. “I’ve seen more smartweed this year than anything. It’s all over the Upper and Lower Delta. Ducks absolutely eat it. It’s a preferred native food source for them. In the Lower Delta, hunters kill a good variety. They might kill any duck species that moves through Alabama. It’s a very diverse area.”

The grassy islands and shorelines of Mississippi Sound and coastal bays can also provide good action, mostly on diving ducks such as redheads, perhaps an occasional canvasback. The redhead population dropped 13 percent since 2022 to 931,000, but hold at 27 percent above the long-term average, says the USFWS.

“In the big, open water of the bays, people kill a lot of redheads, ring-necked ducks and buffleheads,” Knight said. “Gadwalls must move through the Upper Delta to the southern end of the delta. They are going to push to wherever there’s no pressure so they might be far down south to get away from folks.”

Duck and goose seasons run through Jan. 28, 2024. Youngsters, active-duty military and veterans get a bonus day to hunt waterfowl on Feb. 3, 2024.

For specific information on season dates and limits, see www.outdooralabama.com/seasons-and-bag-limits/waterfowl-season.