Some Ducks Not Good For Habitat

By Texas Parks & Wildlfe

A common practice on private ponds, public lakes, subdivision lakes and golf course lakes is to release Muscovy ducks and domestic mallards.

Also, some hunting clubs and private properties have released pen-reared mallards thinking they are enhancing their duck hunting opportunities.

Releasing of Muscovy ducks around private ponds and lakes is not a healthy procedure to follow.

Muscovy ducks are not very attractive and cause unsightly and unsanitary conditions around ponds.

They are also carriers of a disease called duck plague or duck virus enteritis, or DVE.

Duck plague is an acute, contagious and often fatal disease caused by a herpes virus. Outbreaks are thought to be primarily a result of infection and disease among susceptible waterfowl.

Bird to bird contact and contact with the virus that has contaminated the environment will perpetuate an outbreak.

Over the last several years there have been several outbreaks of DVE in Muscovy ducks in subdivision lakes in the Dallas area.

If Muscovy ducks are placed in ponds that wild waterfowl frequent, there is a good risk of spreading duck plague to wild populations.

The largest outbreak of duck plague in wild mallard populations occurred in South Dakota in 1973 when 40,000 mallards died.

Destruction of infected flocks, including eggs, is recommended whenever possible because infected birds that survive are likely to become carriers and can initiate subsequent outbreaks. Presently, there are no effective means of determining whether there are carriers in a flock because the virus cannot be detected in unapparent carriers by standard laboratory methods.

Releasing of pen-reared mallards can also be detrimental to wild duck populations, especially the resident mottled duck.

Mottled ducks are yearlong residents of Florida and the Texas and Louisiana Coast.

Mottled ducks breed in the spring and summer along the Texas Coast, Louisiana Coast and in Florida.

If pen-reared mallards are released in the range of the mottled duck they are prone to breed and hybridize with the mottled duck.

Early studies done by Mr. Charles Stutzenbaker in the 1970s and 1980s showed only a 1 percent mallard/mottled duck hybridization rate.

Recent studies done by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologists are showing hybridization rates from 5 to 7 percent.

Mallard hybridization has been a major problem in black duck populations on the east coast of the United States and in the disjunct mottled duck population in Florida.

It is now illegal in Florida to release captive reared ducks.

Florida has also incorporated a feral mallard season during the spring and summer months to remove non-migrant mallards.

It is also now illegal to release pen-reared mallards into the wild in the state of Louisiana.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department waterfowl biologist are currently working with the University of Alaska in Fairbanks on a genetics study to try and determine the extent of mottled duck mallard hybridization from wings collected from hunter harvested mottled ducks.

The threat of genetic introgression from mallards is unique among the conservation issues affecting the mottled duck population.

It is an issue with important ramifications to the future of mottled ducks, and management actions should strive to minimize interactions between mottled ducks and nonmigratory, feral, released or domesticated mallards.

If you would like to contact your local biologist, see our Web site at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/wildlifebiologist.

Over My Shoulder

A monthly review of the livestock market by J.D. Sartwelle, Jr.

November is down for the count, and we have only one more month left in this year of all years.

The month was punctuated by the need for moisture in our state, deteriorating economic conditions at home and aboard, the end of the election cycle that gave us a new president and who he'll have in his administration and what he intends to do to put our economy back on tract.

Our main focus was the need for moisture in most areas to keep the planted green stuff going and to simply reverse the trend of no moisture.

It's too late in the year to grow any grass, but as long as it stays fairly warm and only cool and not cold, we'll grow a little of this and that and start some kind of winter grass and clover in the bottoms.

There is a dire need for catching up on ground water and rebuild reserves.

Ag markets faced a mixed bag of tricks, with grains moving downward along with oil, fuel, fertilizers and chemicals being a positive, but with declining livestock prices being a definite negative.

We saw declines in the calf trade, yearlings, the fed market, at wholesale and at retail.

It was hard for anything to buck the trend that was being established with daily stock and financial markets throughout the month.

Out of Washington about the most ludicrous of all thoughts came out of EPA who, under authority of the Clean Air Act, advanced proposals to require agricultural industries to receive permits for greenhouse gas emissions.

If you own a cow or a hog or a chicken, you might be buying a permit to do so.

Most ag groups have mounted stiff opposition to the proposal.

In the feed yards, fewer numbers of ready cattle were met with a weakened and shifting consumer demand picture.

It translated into lower prices for the month and went on to affect the yearling and calf trade.

Futures for the most part were unsupportive for the short term as fed cattle prices moved down into the middle eighties.

All is not lost for the feed yards though, as feeder cattle have backed off price wise, as well as grain prices and feeding costs.

At the markets, a slight increase in seasonal marketing patterns seemed to take place as some cattle that had been held back waiting for elections to be over or for a recovering market ran out of time and had to make their moves.

The calf runs became fairly ragged as the dry, cooler weather seasoned and "bellied up" a good many calves and made them less attractive than several weeks ago.

Cool front rains during the second week of the month slowed down a few cattle, but by end of month runs increased.

The last week of the month with the Thanksgiving holiday the pace slowed down and might allow for the pipelines to clear out and start the new month with a clean slate.

November calf prices finished the month dollars lower for most calves and turned downright ugly at times.

When folks who had not kept up saw their calf checks, it amounted to sticker shock in the reverse.

Slaughter cows and bulls also took their hits, but by end of month cow packers begin to catch up and operated more hand-to-mouth than they had for most of the month.

At end of month, it took a good cow to reach over the middle 40s and a sure 'nuff good bull to get near the $60 mark.

The pork boys churned them out and continued to kill well over two million head a week, but saw their price levels fall along with everything else.

By the end of the month, live hogs in the Midwest were selling plus or minus $40 per hundredweight. The export market is helping to keep them alive.

Our economic woes will ultimately be solved, and our plight will improve one day at a time.

We have a lot going for us that might help the animal ag picture.

Cattle numbers are fewer, our input costs are going down, and despite world economic woes, exports are on the rise.

Hot and cold, good and bad, it all gets sorted out a little at a time.

2008 can't come to an end without having one final month, so come on, December.

Ag Department Gives Weekly Recap

For the week ending Nov. 29, feeder cattle prices at Texas auctions were mixed in light holiday-week trade.

The average for 500 to 600 pound steers increased by $2 per hundredweight, while prices for heavier weight cattle were mostly steady to $6 lower.

Fed cattle prices were higher in response to recent increases in beef prices and improved processor margins.

Cotton and grain prices were also higher following increases on the stock markets and optimism for improvements in the general economy.

As for futures markets, feeder cattle, finished cattle, cotton, wheat and corn ended the week higher, while lumber was lower.

Parts of East Texas reported up to 3 inches of rain during the week, while most of the state recorded one-half inch or less.

Topsoil moisture remains in very short to adequate supply.

Cotton harvest progressed to 67 percent complete, slightly behind the 70 percent on average by this date.

Corn, grain sorghum, soybean and peanut harvest are nearing completion.

Winter wheat is 96 percent seeded, with the emerged crop in mostly fair to good condition and needing moisture in most areas.

Pastures across the state are in mostly fair to poor condition.