

A brief report of ducks surveys conducted at Belize (2005-2006)

Introduction

This brief report is for the duck surveys season conducted at Belize Central America from October 2005 to April 2006. The survey was conducted by a group of volunteers and was financed by Ducks Unlimited Inc. It is an effort to see population trends throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The main wetlands were divided into three main sections namely northern, central and southern Belize. The Northern region is composed of the shipstern lagoon, the central region are the Crooked tree lagoon network, Booths rivers swamps, Blue creek Rio Hondo, Cox lagoon and Cooks lagoon, the southern region is Aguacaliente lagoon and Temash wetlands.

Methods.

The ducks surveys were carry out by airplane on a Cessna 172 single-engine high-wing. The surveys were conducted on transects along the designated wetlands. The surveys were done at the last weekend of the months of October, January, March and April. This is in accordance to the dates agreed by the Central American and Caribbean counterparts. Whenever the surveys cannot be done on the date agreed an effort was made to be conducted no later than a week before or a week after the agreed date.

The aerial survey started at an average of 0730 hrs and ended at 1300hrs. While in the survey process the observers scan the wetlands on both sides of the airplane. When a flock of ducks is located it is identified by species and an estimated total is given and recorded on a data sheets. The process continues until the transect is surveyed in its totality, then the airplane proceeds to the nearby wetland. The adjacent network of lagoons in the designated wetlands was also explored for ducks who might not be seen in the transect route.

Participants

Wilber Martinez (Coordinator)

Boris Arevalo (observer)

Isaias Pol (observer)

Norman Martinez (observer)

Leonides Sosa (observer)

David Dueck (Pilot)

Observation

The main wetlands surveyed during the season of 2005- 2006 were Shipstern Lagoon, Crooked tree lagoon, Blue Creek Rio Hondo rice farms, Booths rivers swamps and Aguacaliente lagoon. The highest peak for *Anas discors* were recorded in the month of October and January with and a Grand total of 15,900 and 18,300 respectively. The Highest concentration per site was on Blue creek Rio Hondo site with a total of 15,000 individuals during the month of October. The Booths River swamp area proof to be important for *Anas discors* with a high record of 7000 individuals and 5000 for Cox/Cooks lagoon during the month of January. The numbers of *Anas discors* kept dropping steadily throughout the months until April with the lowest number of 200 individuals. This trend shows that Belize wetlands are important for the fall migration of ducks. An important factor that influence the increased of numbers of ducks foraging in rice farms in Blue creek Rio Hondo might be the effects of hurricane Katrina on the stop over sites in southeastern USA. The resident species with greatest number in Belize is *Dendrocygna autumnalis* with a maximum number of 17,700 individuals during the month of January. *Dendrocyna autumnalis* was also present in all sites and all surveys of this season.

Table summarizing the most abundant duck species by month during the 2005-2006 surveys.

Species	October 2005	January 2006	March 2006	April 2006
<i>Anas discors</i>	15,900	18,300	2,950	200
<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	1,395	17,700	6,450	3,075