



blue-winged teal
(*Anas discors*)

Where to Get Help

For more information about managing shallow water, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service in the phone book under US Government, or visit us on the web at: www.nrcs.gov



mottled duck nest
(*Anas fulvigula*)



blue-winged teal
(*Anas discors*)

Mottled Duck & Resident Water Birds



Mottled ducks on a shallow water area in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana in August. Photographs, NRCS Wildlife Biologist, John Pitre

Speak of shallow water areas for waterfowl and many wetland managers on the Gulf Coast immediately think about migrating and wintering ducks and geese. Indeed, much effort appropriately goes into establishing and managing wetlands to provide resting and feeding places for migratory waterfowl during winter and spring (See LA Tech Note 83). However, management of shallow freshwater wetlands and adjacent uplands including agricultural lands also needs to take into consideration the habitat requirements of resident mottled ducks (*Anas fulvigula*) and other important wetland birds that nest in coastal Louisiana and Texas.

Mottled ducks are unlike most waterfowl in North America because they are non-migratory and must spend their entire life within a relatively small geographic area. Mottled ducks are year-round residents of the Gulf Coastal zone from Laguna de Tamiahua south of Tampico, Mexico north and eastward to Florida. Habitats used by mottled ducks include coastal marsh, rice fields, crawfish ponds, haylands, small grain croplands, idle fields, permanent pasture, and grasslands. Being non-migratory, mottled ducks must satisfy all of their annual resource needs for nesting, brood-rearing, molting, and wintering from habitats within the coastal zone. Thus, mottled ducks and coastal wetland residents are especially sensitive to changes in habitat availability associated with wetland loss or degradation, and changing land uses and agricultural practices in coastal Louisiana and Texas.

Threats to coastal habitats and indications of declining populations have raised concern for mottled ducks and other birds that share these habitats such as little blue heron (*Egretta caerulea*), and king rail (*Rallus elegans*). Management of shallow water areas presents a unique opportunity to benefit not only migrants and wintering birds but also wetland birds that depend upon coastal habitats for nesting and rearing their young.

Management Strategy

Managing wetlands for breeding mottled ducks requires that shallow water, 6-10 inches in depth be present throughout the spring and summer (March – July). Open water feeding areas with submersed vegetation interspersed equally with flooded emergent vegetation (i.e., 50:50 open water to flooded emergent vegetation area) for escape cover is ideal. Note that extended or perennial flooding may be required to establish submersed vegetation. If precipitation is low, wetland water levels can be maintained during spring by pumping well water or re-lifting surface water. Shallow wetlands with extensive areas of flooded emergent vegetation may be used after the brood rearing period by molting ducks (July-August). Dewatering or disturbance should be avoided during the brood-rearing and molting periods when mobility is limited and ducks are especially sensitive to disturbance.



Shallow water areas being managed for breeding mottled ducks should have nearby grasslands adequate for nesting. Cover used by nesting mottled ducks ranges from stands of native, warm season grasses and forbs with little or no woody vegetation to ungrazed or lightly grazed pasture, haylands, and small grain croplands. Nesting blocks located adjacent to shallow-water areas should be greater than 40 acres in size (Larger nesting blocks are recommended to minimize predation rates on hens and their nests).

Managing shallow water areas and adjacent nesting cover in this manner will provide benefits to mottled ducks, locally nesting teal, and numerous other wetland birds. Note, however, that shallow water areas occasionally may need to undergo slow dewatering and manipulations (e.g., disking) to maintain the desired plant community.



This NRCS Technical Note was developed in cooperation with the Gulf Coast Joint Venture

References

Stutzenbaker, C.D., 1988, The Mottled Duck, It's Life History, Ecology, and Management. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, TX. 209 pp

Wilson, B.C. 2007. North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Gulf Coast Joint Venture: Mottled Duck Conservation Plan. North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Albuquerque, NM. 27 pp + appendixes

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