

# **Aerial Waterfowl and Waterbirds Survey Report**

## **November 7–11, 2016**



Prepared by:

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The first aerial waterfowl and waterbird survey was conducted by SCDNR wildlife biologist Molly Kneece from November 7-11, 2016. September and October surveys were not possible because of weather conditions, and because we were awaiting clearance from the Federal Aviation Administration to fly surveys below 500 feet above ground level (AGL). We will conduct subsequent surveys monthly from December 2016-April 2017. These surveys will monitor abundance and distribution of waterfowl and waterbirds in relation to weather and habitat conditions throughout coastal South Carolina from Murrells Inlet to Savannah, Georgia and inland including the Cooper River and Santee Cooper Lakes.

The November survey was flown at 500 feet AGL under high visibility with light to variable winds. Highest concentrations of dabbling ducks and other waterfowl were recorded in the Santee Delta and ACE Basin regions. Tundra swans were sighted at Bear Island WMA near Green Pond, SC. Managed tidal wetlands have been flooded and are currently holding greatest concentrations of waterfowl and other observed waterbirds, including cormorants, egrets, herons, and storks. Most inland impoundments managed for agricultural and moist-soil plants are flooded or being inundated, and waterfowl were sighted swimming amid flooded corn and emergent vegetation.

Because the November survey was flown at 500 feet AGL, we were not able to attain pre-determined levels of detection and identification of waterfowl and waterbirds. We have recently been granted an FAA waiver, allowing surveys to be flown at 200 foot AGL. These low altitude surveys will improve detection, identification, and estimation of waterfowl and waterbirds. Beginning with the December 2016 survey, reports will include waterfowl and other waterbird abundance estimates and density maps of the survey areas, displayed on the SCDNR waterfowl survey website (<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/wildlife/waterfowlsurvey.html>).

The aerial survey project is being supported by the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Inc., James C. Kennedy Waterfowl and Wetlands Conservation Center of Clemson University/Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science, Nemours Wildlife Foundation, SCDNR, South Carolina Waterfowl Association, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks is cooperating by providing guidance on survey and website technologies. We are sincerely grateful to our partners.



Panorama of Cedar Island, Santee Coastal Reserve, McClellanville, SC