PINTAIL POPULATION AND CALIFORNIA HARVEST

Q: What are we looking at here?
A: The top line is the breeding population count in the “Traditional Survey Area,” where most pintails are born (see map on facing page). The bottom line is the estimated California harvest. Generally, our harvest trades with the populations.

Q: What else should we look at?
A: Take a look at limits, which are represented in shaded backgrounds:
- Note that when the daily bag limit doubled from 1 to 2, the harvest did not double, which tells us that just because the limit is 2, doesn’t mean every hunter gets 2 a day.
- During that same period, the breeding population hit its highest count since 1980 (when, incidentally, the daily limit of pintail was 2).
- Under the old limits-setting process, the lower breeding population count in 2016 would have led to a daily limit of 1 last season, but instead, our limit was 2 because regulations are now set based on the previous year’s breeding population count. Nonetheless, California’s harvest went down in 2016-17, and the breeding population increased this spring.

CALIFORNIA MALLARD POPULATION AND HARVEST

Q: What’s the upshot?
A: California’s mallard harvest tracks more closely with the California mallard breeding population than the mid-continental mallard breeding population. This is consistent with numerous studies indicating that about 70% of mallards killed here are from here.

Q: Do the bottom lines mean we’re killing all the California mallards?
A: No! That yellow line is a count of mid-continent mallards in the spring—note that when the daily limit doubled from 1 to 2, the harvest did not double. The question is: are you killing more than a day? If the harvest isn’t enough, then we’ll likely look at how many we’re accepting. Again, it is something that we’re just starting to explore. When the local mallard breeding populations decline, we don’t keep killing the same number of mallards, despite the fact that the limit is 2 winning. In that sense, harvest is somewhat self-regulating.

CALIFORNIA DUCK FACTORY

Known to biologists and bird nerds as the “Traditional Survey Area,” this is where the vast majority of ducks that we hunt in the United States are born and raised. This “mid-continental” area is critical for four of the top six species we bag in California—green-winged teal, pintail, wigeon and snowbear.

WHERE CALIFORNIA DUCKS ARE MADE

More than 100,000

More than 600,000

0 to 9,999

100,000 to 199,999

50,000 to 99,999