



PINTAIL ACTION GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 25, 2004

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Pacific Flyway Council appointed Dan Yparraguirre (California Dept. Fish and Game) to represent the Pacific Flyway on the PAG.
- A PAG meeting is scheduled to take place in conjunction with the Wildlife Society conference in Calgary on September 18th, from 8:30am to 5:00pm at the Hyatt Regency.
- This summer, Mike Eichholz, Bob Clark and Terry Kowalchuk will try to validate the method of estimating breeding probability by examining ovaries for the presence or absence of post-ovulatory follicles for pintails.
- A contract agreement has been reached with Ms. Rita Sanders to develop the Pintail Action Group website. Ideas for inclusion are still needed. Please email your suggestions to [Karla Guyn](#) or [Joe Fleskes](#).
- Kevin Kraai, of Texas Parks and Wildlife, reports that as of May 3-7 2004, seven radioed pintail hens were still on the Gulf Coast. This is probably the latest pintails have ever stayed and to the best of his knowledge, there are no breeding records for that area.

SPRING HABITAT CONDITIONS

Early spring (April) habitat conditions were fair to good for the southern and southwestern regions of **Manitoba**. In western **Saskatchewan**, prairie habitats were poor to fair and fair conditions existed in the southwest corner of the province. Good conditions were found along the Canadian-U.S. border in the southern Coteau although northwest in the Coteau, habitats were fair. In general, many habitats in prairie **Alberta** were poor to fair. The Milk River Ridge (southwest) and the Cypress Hills (southeast) areas were in good condition.

Regions of **North Central United States**, including eastern Montana and western North and South Dakota, had good to excellent habitat conditions. Habitats were fair in Minnesota, southern North Dakota, northern South Dakota, as well as the rest of Montana. Conditions in south central South Dakota were poor.

Severe snowstorms moved across the southern Canadian prairies on May 11-12th 2004, dumping up to 45 cm of snow and rain in Manitoba, 10-30 cm in Saskatchewan and 25-30 cm in Alberta. This has upgraded water conditions across the region although the cold temperatures and harsh weather likely had a negative impact on initial pintail nesting efforts.



May 12th 2004 - Oak Hammock Marsh, Manitoba

Break-up is several weeks ahead of normal in many areas of **Alaska**. Alaska experienced large amounts of snow this year but it melted very quickly and drained before most of the birds arrived.

MODELING POPULATION DYNAMICS

Mike Runge (USGS), Paul Flint (USGS), Ken Richkus (USFWS), Jennifer Arnold (Auburn Univ.) and Bob Clark (CWS) met for 2 days at Patuxent in mid-February to develop a framework for modeling population dynamics of northern pintails in Alaska and Canadian prairies.

Ken and Bob have been summarizing available vital rate estimates for pintails, and forwarding these to the PAG

modeling group. The Auburn group has been modifying their programs to accommodate "age" in vital rate delineation and generally to make their software more pintail-friendly. This is significant because their approach to modeling will enable us to more easily evaluate impacts of disease (e.g., botulism-cholera, singly or together) on populations. Paul and Mike have been doing initial analyses that will enable us to feed data into the "Auburn" modeling software. [Bob Clark](#)

PINTAIL IN THE MEDIA

On May 26th 2004, DUC's Dr. Karla Guyn will host a Media Tour for primary writers of Prairie Canada to discuss the decline of the northern pintail. This tour will focus on Saskatchewan's Missouri Coteau and will showcase the partnerships and conservation programs that contribute to sustainable agriculture and long-term commitments to retain species diversity. Participants will learn about pintail friendly programs such as winter wheat, conserved wetlands/uplands, forage conversion, and rangeland management as well as conservation tools like conservation easements, land purchases, tax credit program, and multi-species/interagency planning.

- Check out the pintail article "*Nose Dive*" featured in the April/May 2004 issue of the [National Wildlife](#) magazine.
- Keep an eye out for "*Canary of the Prairie*" pintail article in the Spring 2004 issue of DUC's [Conservator](#) magazine.
- The "*Path of Recovery for Pintails*" article will discuss the formation and objectives of the Pintail Action Group in the "In an Eggshell" section of the next issue of [Birdscapes](#).

ATLANTIC FLYWAY – PINTAIL RESEARCH ISSUES

In response to the PAG letter to all Flyways, the Atlantic Flyway (AF) offered the following priorities for their region:

- Questions in the AF relate to geographic derivation of the harvest, the relative contribution of "eastern" pintails in this harvest, and a better understanding of the ecology and population dynamics of pintails breeding in eastern areas of North America. The AF would be interested in research to address these information gaps.
- The AF is participating in a one-year research project, headed up by Dr. Rich Malecki and Dr. Sue Sheaffer of the New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University. They want to identify breeding ground affiliations of female pintails wintering in the AF. Forty-one birds from six states were equipped with satellite-tracked transmitters to monitor the chronology of migration

and to identify important spring and fall staging and/or stopover areas.

- Dr. Malecki thinks there is a possibility of using stable isotope analysis of feathers to gain information on breeding ground derivation of the harvest.
- The PAG is developing criteria to reduce banding data deficiencies. The AF suggests that the PAG specifically identify and include eastern breeding areas in these efforts. Large numbers of molting birds can be found along the Ontario coast of James and Hudson Bays on shallow fresh water lakes. In the late 1980's, an AF crew banded more than 300 pintails by drive-trapping molting flocks. It would be possible to band 1,000-2,000 birds in a week for a reasonable cost. One limitation is that the birds are primarily adult males. This would give a great sample, with the new reporting rates, to estimate survival for this specific age/sex cohort. [John Dunn](#)

CURRENT AND UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS

Michael Miller (in conjunction with multiple authors) is working on the following manuscripts:

1. *Spring migration of northern pintails from California: routes, timing, and destinations.*
2. *Efficiency of the May breeding population survey to account for northern pintails: a determination using satellite telemetry.*
3. *Location, characteristics, and use of stopovers of northern pintails during spring migration from California.*
4. *Migration flight speed and distances of northern pintails during spring migration from California, Texas, and New Mexico.*

The following manuscript is planned: *Spring migration of northern pintails in North America: a*

comparison between the Pacific and Central Flyways.

Recent publications:

Miller, M. R., J.Y. Takekawa, D.L. Orthmeyer, J. P. Fleskes, M.L. Casazza, M.W. Perry. 2003. *Tracking spring migration of northern pintails with satellite telemetry. Discovery for Recovery: An international pintail research initiative.* Final Report. U.S. Geological Survey, Dixon California. 63pp.

Fleskes, J. P., and D. S. Battaglia. 2004. *Northern pintail habitat use and waterfowl abundance during spring migration in southern Oregon-Northeast California (SONEC).* Final Report. U.S. Geological Survey, Dixon, California. 58pp.