

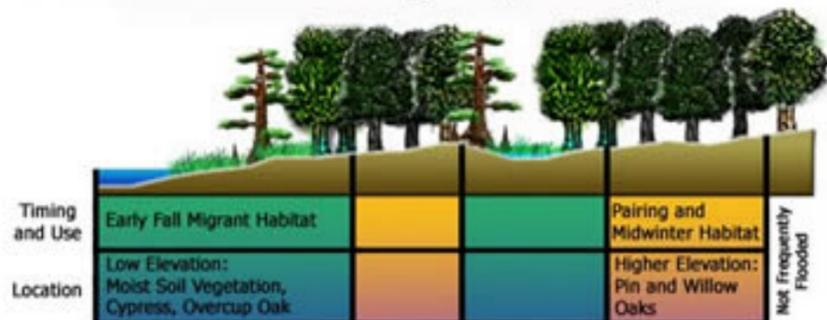
DUCK CREEK

Golden Anniversary Renovation

It is all about timing: Pies, Ducks, and Acorns

Like most people I enjoy eating, especially pie. Early in the summer I enjoy blackberry pie. Later on in the summer I like to have peach pie. As summer turns to fall I prefer apple pie. During the holidays I enjoy pumpkin and pecan pies. Part of the great thing about these desserts is that they are made from seasonally ripened fruit and nuts. Now, I could get any one of these at a different time of the year, but it would cost me a little bit money and time because it would be out of season. The cost for waterfowl to search for foods that aren't in season is wasted energy, which translates to poor body condition, which could lead to death. They must eat what is in season and what is available to them through shallowly flooded conditions. Migration is how waterfowl have adapted to timing of flooded conditions and seasonal foods across the continent.

The Bootheel is at the northern limits of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. Annual rainfall for this region falls between November and April. Historically, the wetland habitat in this region was bottomland forests and swamps. Sloughs and emergent marsh generally occur at lower elevations and remain flooded to some degree in the summer. Early successional grasses and broadleaves such as smartweed, millet, sprangletop, beggarticks, rice cutgrass, and panic grass grow and germinate in these lower elevations where moist soil conditions occur. Cypress, tupelo, and buttonbush also exist here and are the first habitats to flood in the fall. Coincidentally, the moist-soil seeds and bugs in this shallowly flooded habitat meet the nutritional needs of mallards during early fall migration.



Availability of Seasonally Flooded Habitats of Bottomland Forests and Use by Mallards

As temperatures become colder and mallards start to pair they require more energy and cover. At the same time the increasing winter rains begin to flood habitats at higher elevations. This is when the oaks and good agricultural land historically were flooded. It is during this time that mallards shift to higher energy foods such as acorns and waste grain. As winter progresses bugs also respond to the flooded leaf litter in the timber and are another source of food for mallards. Hopefully you can see that as precipitation gradual floods across elevations and habitats, migrating and wintering mallards also enjoy seasonal "desserts", which coincide with their nutritional and energetic needs.



Moist soil seeds, invertebrates, acorns, waste grain, and roots all play an important role in meeting a mallards diet during the course a year.

On Duck Creek, Unit A provides the moist soil habitat needed during early fall migration. Our renovation plans for Unit B will also provide this habitat and provide additional waterfowl hunting opportunity. As fall progresses to winter the resources in the flooded timber becomes more important. Likewise, you begin to see a shift in the amount of bird use and that's when it is good to hunt in the timber.

So this fall as you sit down to have some pie, take a moment to think about the timing of waterfowl migration, what type of food mallards might be looking for, and where they might find it depending on if it is early or late season. Once you've had a few moments to reflect and daydream about ducks and the upcoming waterfowl season, feel free to dig in and enjoy your pie. I know I will.



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