Mottled duck telemetry update 8-26-09

We are nearing the completion of the first year of the project. Please see the first annual report for some preliminary results from year one. To start year two our goal was to radio-mark an additional 50 birds in the rural areas of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) and 5 birds in the Kissimmee River Basin on or near Aquatic Habitat Restoration and Enhancement sites (AHRE). Next, starting in early October, we will attempt to capture 50 adult females in and around West Palm Beach, for a total 105 mottled ducks for year two. In addition, we radio-marked 10 purple swamp hens in hopes of gaining information on the movement patterns of this newly established exotic species.

From 13-16 August a team consisting of personnel from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, Ducks Unlimited, Auburn University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture captured and radio-marked 50 adult female mottled ducks on 4 areas with the EAA (Figure 1). We marked birds on 3 Storm Water Treatment Areas (STAs) and one complex of flooded farm fields. I want to take this opportunity to again thank everyone that took the time to help in this effort. We worked three straight nights and mornings from about 9 pm to 8 am in less than optimal conditions. Without the help provided by all the volunteers there is no way we could have marked this many birds.

The newly marked birds have now been back in the wild for over a week and the initial survival of the birds after surgery looks good. We have had 2 birds die within the first week and we know the whereabouts of every other bird except one. I am confident we will locate this missing bird during our next aerial tracking session scheduled for tomorrow. We are now tracking the new birds every day. We anticipate most of the birds will remain on their molting/capture areas into early October with some hanging around late into the month. After that, as they regain their ability to fly, they should start to spread out over much of south Florida. That is, if they move like the first-year birds moved. We are still tracking a handful of rural birds we marked back in September 2008. The rest of the year-one bird's radios have failed due to dead batteries. We will continue to track all birds on a daily basis over the next year.

We also are still tracking 13 urban birds radio-marked during winter 2009. We plan on capturing and radio-marking an additional 50 adult females from the urban/suburban areas around West Palm Beach starting in October. We will be using an air-powered net cannon as our primary capture method this year - a method we did not have last year. We hope the net cannon will allow us to capture the 50 birds we need in just a few attempts. Last year we relied on bait traps and it took us 3 months to catch just 16 birds.

As has been the case in past years, it is proving very difficult to capture mottled ducks in the Kissimmee River Basin. We have had a wet summer and all wetlands are flooded. Even some pastures in the area remain flooded. This abundance of water has spread the ducks out and we have not yet captured any mottled ducks in areas near or on AHRE sites. We will continue to try and capture birds in this area through September. I am confident we will be successful.

In addition to mottled ducks, we radio-marked 10 Purple Swam Hens on two sites (Figure 1) during the last capture session. The purple swamp hen is an exotic species that is now established in some areas of south Florida. This species threatens to compete with native species such as the purple gallinule for food and nesting habitat. We hope to gain valuable insight into the movement patterns of this species, so we can devise the best way to contain its spread within the state.

Thank you for your interest in this research and please stay tuned as the second year of this project progresses.

Mottled Duck and Purple Swamp Hen Rural Capture Sites 2009-10

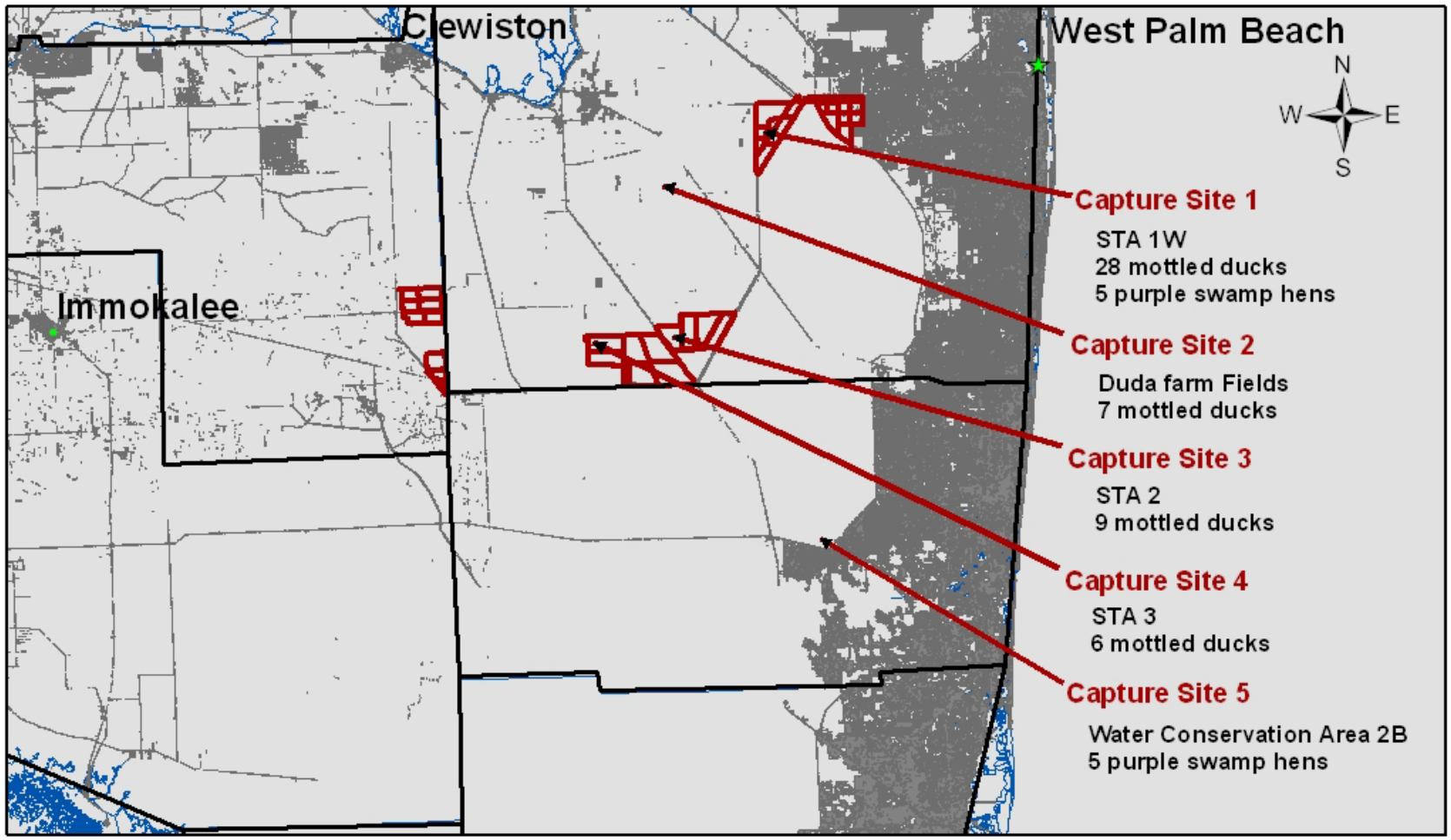

Figure 1