



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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DUCK FALL FLIGHT EXPECTED TO BE SIMILAR TO LAST YEAR;
BETTER FLIGHTS OF GEESE ANTICIPATED

The number of ducks flying south during this year's fall migration should be about the same as the last 3 years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates in its 1993 "Fall Flight Forecast."

The Service anticipates a fall flight of 59 million ducks from the surveyed area this year, compared with 62 million in 1992. This year's flight might have been even smaller except improved habitat conditions in a number of areas resulted in more broods produced than in 1992.

"Overall, the fall duck flight will not be that much different than what we have seen the past few years," said Richard Smith, the Service's Acting Director. "But the Service continues to be concerned about duck populations limping along at levels well below long-term averages due to unfavorable weather and habitat loss."

The total estimated breeding population for all ducks in the survey area--covering 1.3 million square miles across the north-central United States, western and northern Canada, and Alaska--was 26.3 million, down from 29.4 million in 1992, as numbers for many familiar species declined.

Waterfowl habitat conditions monitored during the spring duck survey generally improved from last year in the north-central United States and southern Alberta. However, conditions deteriorated in southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba because of dry weather and the effect of agriculture on wetlands and associated uplands. Water levels were lower than normal in northern forest regions of the prairie provinces but improved in the Northwest Territories and Alaska.

Since the spring survey, more precipitation has fallen on the north-central states and southern Alberta, and much-needed rainfall has benefitted the drier regions of Prairie Canada.

Better habitat conditions have resulted in an improved outlook for duck production in a number of areas, offsetting the effects of reduced breeding populations on the fall flight.

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Ducks that fail to successfully nest in the spring can try again during early summer if habitat conditions are right.

The 1993 mallard breeding population was estimated at 5.7 million, essentially unchanged from the 6 million estimates in 1992. Large increases in mallards were seen in Montana and the Dakotas, while sharp declines occurred in southern Saskatchewan and southern Manitoba. Overall, mallard numbers were 20 percent below the long-term average. The number of mallards expected to migrate south this fall is 8.8 million, compared to last year's prediction of 9.2 million.

Blue-winged teal numbers declined 26 percent from last year and were 23 percent below the long-term average. Numbers for other key species, such as the northern pintail, green-winged teal, American wigeon, and canvasback, remained roughly at 1992 levels.

But levels continue to be significantly below the long-term average for the American wigeon, northern pintail, redhead, and scaup. For example, redheads were 17 percent below the 1955-1992 average, while scaup numbers were 27 percent below the long-term average.

On a positive note, gadwall and northern shoveler remain above their respective 1955-92 averages.

The fall flight forecast for ducks does not represent an actual count of birds, but is a projection based on surveys of breeding populations and estimates of brood production. Biologists regard the duck breeding population as a more accurate and reliable figure than the fall flight index.

Most North American goose populations are at levels above long-term averages. An early spring thaw led to good to excellent nesting conditions across much of the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

The overall outlook for goose production in 1993 is good to excellent, particularly in the eastern Arctic; and represents a substantial improvement over the poor production year of 1992. These favorable conditions should benefit most Canada goose, snow goose, white-fronted goose, brant, and tundra swan populations.

However, biologists continue to express concern for certain populations of geese, such as the Southern James Bay and Atlantic Canada goose populations, where marked declines in numbers have been observed in recent years.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers or participates in a number of programs to manage and conserve, or
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restore, waterfowl habitat. For example, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, an international partnership effort, has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 2 million acres of wetland habitat since 1986. The Service also has worked with landowners to protect, restore, or enhance more than 200,000 acres of wetlands and associated upland habitat on private lands.

FINAL FRAMEWORKS RELEASED FOR
EARLY SEASON MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has issued final regulations for early (opening before October 1) migratory bird hunting seasons. There are no major changes from the Service's initial proposal released in July.

Under the regulations, hunting of teal will be allowed only after sunrise, except where states undertake studies on the impact of pre-sunrise hunting on non-target ducks. This is a change from 1992 when hunters were allowed to start hunting teal one-half hour before sunrise.

The only other significant new restriction deals with the special sea duck season in the Atlantic Flyway. This year hunters will be allowed to have a maximum of 4 scoters in their combined 7-bird limit for scoters, eiders, and oldsquaw. Last year, they could have any combination.

The Service also opted to expand September Canada goose hunting opportunities, approving 3-year experimental seasons in Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia.

In addition, the Service approved extended Canada goose seasons for Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, southeast Pennsylvania, and Washington. Requested by the states, these seasons are intended mainly to harvest resident Canada geese before migratory Canada geese arrive. A number of states are experiencing problems and conflicts caused by rapid growth in the number of non-migratory Canada geese.

Under the final regulations, the Service also eliminated permit requirements, enlarged bag limits, and extended the season length for Canada goose hunting in Washington and Oregon.

Other than these changes, this year's final regulations are largely the same as last year.

The regulations apply to doves, woodcock, band-tailed pigeons, rails, snipe, common moorhen and purple gallinules, sandhill cranes, sea ducks, and special September waterfowl

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seasons, as well as migratory bird hunting seasons in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

Complete regulations will be published in the Federal Register. Hunters should check state hunting regulations for specific local information on permits, bag limits, and open areas.