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SWANS COUNTED ON EASTERN WATERS

Practically all of the swan population of eastern North America concentrates for winter quarters on Chesapeake Bay, Md., Back Bay, Virginia, and Currituck Sound, N.C., and adjacent waters. Here they can be counted with reasonable accuracy, and early in December, 1925, experts of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture found a total of 14,567.

The greatest numbers were on Chesapeake Bay, including the Susquehanna Flats, where 6,920 were counted. On Currituck Sound, North Carolina, the number observed was 2,968, and on Lake Mattamuskeet, in the same State, 2,494 were counted. A slightly smaller number, 2,016, was noted on Back Bay, Virginia, and on the Potomac River near its junction with the Chesapeake they counted 169 during the same census. Undoubtedly in all cases more swans were present and escaped count, so that the total number probably exceeds 15,000.

This is the first fairly complete census of these birds the Survey has been able to make, and little can be said with certainty as to their increase or decrease. There is no doubt, however, that the swans have become bolder in the presence of man, a natural result of the absolute protection given them over a ten-year period which will expire in December, 1926. Under the provisions of the law the close season will continue after the ten-year term until regulations are promulgated by the President allowing an open season during which these birds may be hunted.

The greater familiarity of the birds has brought them into feeding areas formerly little used by them, such as shooting ponds on club preserves, and there has been complaint of their consuming large quantities of wild-duck foods, even the entire visible supply in some cases. This, however, does not mean the destruction of the food supply, for seeds and rootstocks always remain in sufficient quantity to renew the stand the next season.

Swans compete for food with shoal-water ducks, not with deep-water ducks, but so far as observed they have caused no permanent injury to the extensive wild-fowl resorts they frequent. The clearing of vegetation out of shooting ponds by swans is not an important factor from a sporting point of view, as on ponds frequently shot over in this region baiting is often resorted to to keep ducks coming to them.

The long closed season on swans now in force was designed to perpetuate a superb species of wild life. Careful observations of these birds will continue to be made by Government agents, and annual counts of their numbers are planned. On this study and these counts will be based any recommendations which the Biological Survey may make regarding modification of the protected status of swans.