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DROUGHT-STRICKEN DUCKS
FLOCK TO FEDERAL REFUGES

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Thousands of wild ducks in the drought-stricken areas in the Great Plains, particularly in the Dakotas, are flocking into the northern refuges established by the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey. Left behind at dried potholes and small lakes are the bodies of many young ducks. Some of them died in their nests -- others perished in traveling overland with the adult birds in search of food and water.

Latest reports to the Biological Survey describe the waterfowl situation in the drought-stricken areas as "critical." In North Dakota and other areas where small bodies of water have dried up the losses are expected to be as great, or greater than they were during the severe drought of 1934.

Sportsmen and game officials in North Dakota, however, are carrying on "rescue operations" with fairly good results. They are transferring large numbers of young ducks from the dry, or drying areas to areas where water is plentiful. Last spring a large number of the ducks flying northward settled at potholes and small lakes in North Dakota and in similar areas in other parts of the Great Plains. These places were filled with water then, but about two weeks ago they began to dry up.

Officials of the Biological Survey fear that many of the late broods in the drought area will perish. Much of the natural cover for ducks, the officials say, has been destroyed and under severe drought conditions young ducks commonly die in a few days. The drought region includes extensive nesting areas of pintails, scaups, spoonbills, mallards, teal, canvasbacks, redheads, and other species.

The officials are especially concerned over the fate of the redheads, canvasbacks, and other diving ducks. The numbers of these species have been alarmingly decreased in recent years, and a larger proportion of their breeding range, as compared with that of other species, has been included in the areas ravaged by droughts of recent years as well as by the present drought.

One of the serious after-effects of the drought for ducks in the Great Plains region will probably be a shortage next fall of natural aquatic food. Large numbers of these food plants have already been dried up by the drought without bearing fruit or seeds.

Many of the Bureau's refuges, notwithstanding the drought, are in good condition and have enough water to keep the marshes in the refuges in good shape until late September. By that time most of the birds, especially the young ducks, will be able to take care of themselves better.

The drought disaster, the Biological Survey points out, is thus proving the worth of the refuge program for waterfowl restoration. No losses of young birds from drought have been reported on the refuges this year, although on many areas the improvement work has not been completed. Water-impounding measures being carried on with CCC help have resulted in the conservation of water supplies that in other years have vanished with the spring run-offs. This year the restored waterfowl areas are oases in a dry land, and adult birds by the thousands are finding them to be refuges in more ways than one.

The Biological Survey also points out the value of restoration projects in minimizing the general effects of drought. If a great many more of the areas unwisely taken from the birds could be restored to their natural uses, the Survey believes that the severity of future droughts could be lessened and the lowering of subterranean water levels checked in the vicinity of the restored areas.