



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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REPORT DARK PICTURE FROM DUCK BREEDING GROUNDS

"Late reports on waterfowl nesting conditions on most of the northern breeding grounds received from Canadian wildlife officials are extremely discouraging and confirm the reports coming in from our own investigators," Albert M. Day, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, declared today.

Good reports from Service observers on nesting conditions in certain areas in southern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan which have had ample water are the bright spots in an otherwise drab picture, according to Mr. Day. "These areas, however, supply ducks primarily to the western states. In the eastern two-thirds of the country duck hunting prospects this fall are definitely poorer."

The Canadian Department of Mines and Resources, at Ottawa, has informed Mr. Day that many of the early nests in southeastern Ontario and southern Quebec were flooded by very high water levels and that the extremely late season in the James Bay district apparently has prevented the nesting of many waterfowl. "A month's search for nests of black ducks in the marshes on the west coast of James Bay from Moose River to Albany River revealed none."

The Manitoba Provincial Department of Mines and Natural Resources advised the Service on July 18 that "waterfowl prospects in Manitoba were poor this year in comparison with last year. Significant feature is that many favorable nesting areas are only lightly populated. Spring migrations very spotty." The Manitoba Federation of Game and Fish Associations recognized these findings and recently passed an unanimous resolution favoring further restrictions in season and bag limits.

J. Dewey Soper, Dominion Wildlife Officer for the Prairie Provinces, has reported very poor waterfowl conditions in the Grande Prairie district. "The same conditions exist north of Peace River, and at Magloire, Kimawan and Winagami Lakes and at Buffalo Bay, Lesser Slave Lake, near Grouard. The situation is universal in the Northwest. The whole set-up has undergone marked deterioration. More water areas exist this year than there were ducks to inhabit them. Hundreds of sloughs, potholes, and small lakes in the Prairie Provinces were seen dramatically underpopulated, or completely destitute of ducks of any kind."

Bruce S. Wright, Director of the Wildlife Management Institute's Northeastern Wildlife Station in New Brunswick reports that their study area--32,500 acres of the best section of the lowlands of the St. John River--showed a decrease of about 50 percent in breeding population between 1945 and 1946, and "all observations since the first arrivals this spring indicate that there is a further decrease this year, but possibly not so drastic.

"The decrease is most marked in blue-winged teal and in wood duck. Black ducks may have decreased slightly from last year, and they are now less than half the 1945 population. The main ring-necked duck hatch is coming off at this writing (July 19) but so far we seem to have seen less than last year. Golden-eyes and green-winged teal seem about the same. Flood losses of first clutches of all terrestrial nesting species were widespread throughout Eastern Canada this spring."

Robert H. Smith, Mississippi flyway biologist for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, after completing 7,000 miles of low altitude aerial coverage of duck nesting areas in northern Saskatchewan and Alberta, advised Director Day on July 11 that the "duck picture in the north country looks much worse than it does on the Prairies."

The density of breeding waterfowl was extremely light throughout the region, even on the areas that appeared to be good duck habitat, according to Mr. Smith. Few ducks were seen and residents and wildlife officials of the region confirmed Mr. Smith's observations when they stated that waterfowl populations were extremely low in the entire area including the Mackenzie delta and the Lake Claire marshes. The same condition was true of the Athabaska delta where Mr. Smith saw only an estimated 4,000 ducks on that famed nesting area.

Arthur S. Hawkins, Service biologist, reporting to Director Day on July 10 on conditions in Manitoba, said, "Everything points toward an extremely poor 1947 hatch in this province. Great floods have hurt nesting over much of Manitoba's principal nesting areas such as Whitewater and Oak Lakes in the southwest, Proven Lake to the Saskatchewan border in the west, Dauphin marshes in the central, Saskatchewan Delta in the north, and Netley in the East. The expected poor breeding success has been verified by the scarcity of broods making their appearance."

In concluding his report, Biologist Hawkins said, "Any improvement in waterfowl numbers during 1947 must come from some place outside Manitoba."

Director Day pointed out that poor nesting conditions in Manitoba will mean poor hunting for Mississippi flyway hunters since most of the ducks that nest in Manitoba travel south in the fall along that flyway. The Mississippi flyway also gets ducks from eastern Saskatchewan which, like Manitoba, also has a serious shortage of birds.

Reports from Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Nevada show a "good nesting population of both ducks and geese" in that region but "survival of young ducks is still problematical." Similar reports have come in from Canadian officials in British Columbia.

In commenting on this latest round-up of data on the waterfowl situation, Mr. Day said, "It is safe to say that even with good nesting conditions we failed to send back the brood stock that we should have sent to populate effectively the marsh areas that came back this year because of improved water conditions. Lakes without nesting ducks are of little importance in producing a crop. It takes ducks to produce ducks. We are in for a poor shooting season."

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