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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Chicago 54, Ill.

August 21, 1947

WATERFOWL NEWSLETTER

The information contained in this waterfowl newsletter is being issued in this form to answer the large number of inquiries which the Fish and Wildlife Service has been receiving daily since the announcement of the 1947 migratory waterfowl hunting regulations requesting more detailed information on how the annual regulations were drawn up, the latest news from Service observers on the northern breeding grounds, and what the chances will be for good shooting during the coming season.

The annual migratory waterfowl hunting regulations which the Service recommends are based on year-round scientific investigations. These begin with the mid-winter inventory which is conducted in January at a time when the ducks and geese are most likely to be settled for the winter and, consequently, are more concentrated. This estimate of the potential breeders which will go north to start the new cycle reveals whether the population trend is upward or downward. Observations made of the spring movements of the migrating birds are followed by surveys of the breeding grounds in the northern United States, Canada, and Alaska during the spring and summer. These latter investigations are the most important because conditions on the breeding grounds during spring and summer will determine the size of the crop and the success of the breeding birds that go north.

In 1947 the Service employed 16 flyway biologists and observers for the purpose of investigating conditions on the breeding grounds in Canada and Alaska this past spring and summer. These experienced men examined the breeding areas by foot, by boat, by automobile, and by plane. From their activities the Service received a constant flow of essential data about the condition of the breeding grounds, productivity, flights, sex ratios, and other factors that are necessary in determining the status of this resource. Not until all these data were carefully studied and evaluated did the Service draft the proposed regulations which were then submitted to State game departments and conservation agencies for their recommendations.

This year, for the first time, the States were permitted to pick the dates for their local hunting season, within a prescribed range of dates. Eastern States--those east of a line extending north and south from the western boundary of Minnesota to and including Louisiana--were offered the choice of 30 consecutive days or a split season of 24 days--two periods of 12 days each. The States west of this line had the opportunity of selecting a season of 35 consecutive days or a split season of 28 days--two periods of 14 days each. Thus, the seasons in the various States this year are those selected and approved by the proper State officials.

Reports on conditions on the northern breeding grounds, as sent in by our field observers, continue to be anything but optimistic. In the words of one of them, "the picture still has to be painted in dull black." Duck production has been poor in most places in Canada except in the southern part of Saskatchewan. These reports from Service observers are substantiated by the findings of Provincial and Dominion wildlife officials in Canada with whom the Service maintains a reciprocal exchange of reports. In recognition of the serious decline of the continental population of waterfowl which has continued for three years, Canada has issued this year the most restrictive hunting regulations in the history of that country, closely approximating those in the United States.

For your information and use we are quoting the following statements from the most recent reports sent in by our field observers in Canada.

A. S. Hawkins, flyway biologist, reported as follows from Delta, Manitoba, on August 8: "Manitoba's best waterfowl breeding marshes this year apparently failed to produce enough ducks to give the Illinois Valley hunting clubs one good shoot. Fortunately, the pothole country did a better job. I estimate that about 100 ducks per section hatched in the better parts of that area, which is large enough in Manitoba to give a figure of about a million ducks produced."

Cecil S. Williams, biologist in charge of the Service's Section of Waterfowl Management Investigations, reporting on August 8, from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, said: "News from the breeding grounds becomes more discouraging with time. Mile after mile of prairie has dried leaving few water areas on which the ducks might be reared. In coming from Forgan Flats to Swift Current yesterday, only nine areas with water were encountered. The total acreage of these would be much less than 100. All this in 88 miles. Today in driving from Swift Current to Regina across that part of Saskatchewan which had a goodly supply of potholes and nesting pairs in May, I counted 42 water areas in 161 miles. The ducks observed were also disappointing--some 143 actually counted and another 50 estimated seen. Nearly 90 percent were on two areas. There doesn't seem to be much question but that even during a good water year (such as this one is supposed to be), the ducks take a beating. It is becoming more clear all the time that establishment of permanent water areas in large numbers with protected nesting areas adjacent is the only way by which the Prairies can be made to consistently produce an appreciable supply of young. Those are the only ones which produce many, even in years such as this.

"There is no question but that ducks in the southern part of Saskatchewan are more numerous than they have been in several years. Nearly every farmer will tell you that, but the picture still has to be painted in dull black. Even with the increases, you could get all the ducks here on one fair-sized lake--and not have any one within speaking distance of another. To the north, the drought is moving south and west. This is drying practically all small ponds and shallow lakes. For the most, however, these temporary areas served only as waiting sites and production stemmed from permanent areas. The stubble nesters probably can be wiped out as almost a complete loss."

Allen G. Smith, flyway biologist, reporting from Calgary, Alberta, on August 10, wrote: "What gave early promise of being one of southern Alberta's best years for waterfowl as well as crops has rapidly deteriorated since July 1. The abrupt end of the cool, wet spring on that day, followed by a full month of very hot, dry winds with no precipitation except hail caused especially severe drought conditions in the central part of the province and very dry weather in the south. Hail, which began earlier than usual this year, has been officially reported as being more severe, more devastating, and more widespread in its destruction than at any time in the past 10 years. As those areas most severely hit were the Edmonton-Camrose area east into Saskatchewan and the extreme southern part of Alberta, it will mean added casualties to waterfowl, as these also represent the two best breeding areas this year."

Hunters in the western states will have the edge on eastern hunters this year because nesting conditions on the breeding grounds of Alaska and western Canada, which produce the ducks and geese for the Pacific and Central flyways, were far better than in the eastern part of the Prairie Provinces which supply the birds that go south along the Mississippi and Atlantic flyways.

Many inquiries have been received for the number of 1946 duck stamps sold for the period ending June 30, 1947. These figures will not be available to us from the Post Office Department until late in October. For the period which ended March 31, 1947, a total of 1,977,660 stamps had been sold.

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