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DECLINE OF WATERFOWL POPULATION SHOWN BY ANNUAL ESTIMATE

A reduction in the breeding potential of the continent's ducks, geese, brant, coot and swans was shown by the final tabulations of the annual waterfowl inventory's figures, Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman announced today.

The annual estimate of North America's waterfowl resources was made January 10-13 by more than 1,000 cooperative observers of the U. S., Canada, Mexico and the West Indies.

In his report to the Secretary, Albert M. Day, Director of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, stated that a decrease of nearly one-fourth in the waterfowl populations was indicated by the inventory. Although this means there will be fewer birds going north to breed this year, Mr. Day said, the losses could be offset by natural reproduction if waterfowl find favorable conditions on the breeding grounds.

The decline shown in the winter estimate is clearly evident to those who have obtained a continent-wide perspective of the water-fowl situation, Mr. Day said in the report, "even though it is true that in many areas local sportsmen have seen more ducks and geese this year than in former years."

"The illusion of an increase was due in large measure to the fact that millions of waterfowl remained in the U. S. during the mild fall, instead of moving on to wintering grounds in Mexico and other points south of the U. S. Border," Mr. Day continued. "In addition, the birds in some areas were concentrated in large flocks on reservoirs and other accumulations of scarce water. Due to drouth conditions, which dried up marshes in some parts of the country, many flocks were forced to use permanent bodies of water as 'home base' and do their foraging for food in adjacent crop lands."

Results of the cooperative Mexican inventory showed a drastic decline in the wintering populations of waterfowl, Mr. Day added. The Mexican survey covered all the important coastal marshes and bays, as well as the water areas of the central highlands.

Reductions in the continent-wide populations of most species of waterfowl were evident. Even the swans, which are not hunted, showed an appreciable decline. According to Mr. Day, this supports the belief that the late 1949 breeding season in the far north, combined with drouths and excessive drainage in the prairie sections of the U. S. and Canada, checked natural reproduction and accounts for much of the waterfowl loss.

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