



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release APRIL 29, 1957

FWS PREPARES FOR SUMMER WATERFOWL BREEDING AND NESTING GROUND SURVEYS

Summer waterfowl surveys and banding operations, part of the continuing program of getting information necessary for the preparation of regulations for the hunting of migratory waterfowl, will begin on May 1, and continue into August, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ross L. Leffler said today.

Other parts of the waterfowl fact-finding program include the wintering ground inventory and the kill survey. In the process of drafting the hunting regulations, all of this is then discussed with the flyway councils and others who have considerable practical knowledge of various aspects of waterfowl management.

Other data which are used by the Service in its deliberations include: Changes, if any, in the distribution pattern as shown by banding returns, reports on feed and feeding ground conditions, probable water supply and an accumulation of pertinent historical material resulting from past activities.

Most of the summer waterfowl surveys and banding will be done on the prairie provinces of Canada and in the pothole area of the Northern Plains States but nesting grounds from California to Labrador and Alaska also will come under reconnaissance during the summer's work.

The first project will be the breeding ground survey to estimate the numbers of pairs of breeding ducks which have survived the various perils of the past year. This work, weather permitting, will start May 1, and be completed late in the month.

The project to determine the nesting success, or the hatch, will begin early in July. The purpose of this project is to estimate the number of young birds which will become part of the flocks which will head southward in the fall.

Banding of the birds will be done in July with the possibility of further banding during August. About 30,000 ducks and geese will be banded. The purpose of this work is to determine the distribution of the birds from the nesting grounds, an important factor in estimating the probable density of birds in each of the four flyways.

The summer waterfowl survey task is a cooperative venture by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Canadian Wildlife Service, State and Provincial fish and game departments. Private organizations like Ducks Unlimited also render valuable aid. Most of the personnel and equipment for the projects are supplied by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Results of the summer surveys are of vital importance to American hunters and conservationists.

Several airplanes, flying transects on a statistically reliable sampling plan, will be used in the breeding ground and nesting success surveys. The transects are 12 miles apart in areas of heavy duck production and 60 miles apart in areas of light production. There are two men to a plane--a pilot and an observer. Flight is low, usually between 100 and 200 feet above the ground. A voice recorder is used to record the count of the birds in each sample strip. The pilot tallies the birds on one side of the plane in addition to holding course while the observer counts those on the opposite side. The planes will fly a total of something over 100,000 miles in making the inventories.

Ground crews, some of them using dogs, will do the banding. Dogs have been used in the past on an experimental basis to find and bring in young mallards. The young mallard leaves the water when frightened and hides in nearby brush and other undercover. The dogs are specially trained to retrieve the birds without injuring them. Other ducks are "drive trapped"; that is, carefully herded into a trap at the end of a pond. They are then banded and released.

The breeding ground and nesting surveys are completed in time to permit Department of the Interior officials to consider the data before the promulgation of hunting regulations. The regulations set the number of days in the season, outside dates within which States may select the time their seasons will run, and maximum daily bag limits. These vary by the flyways in conformity with the waterfowl population level in each one.

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