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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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POPULAR SPECIES DOWN, TOTAL STEADY, MISSISSIPPI WATERFOWL SURVEY SHOWS

The total wintering population of ducks in the Mississippi Flyway was about the same as last year despite sharp declines in the numbers of several popular species, information available at the Department of the Interior indicates. The data also show that the numbers of Canada geese are well below last year's population, but that increases are noted in other species of geese.

The annual winter survey conducted by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, showed that mallards were down 23 percent, redheads down 54 percent, canvasbacks down 46 percent and ring-necked ducks down 32 percent. There was a drop of 24 percent in the numbers of Canada geese seen but the other species--snows, blues, and white-fronts--well above the 10-year average.

An extremely heavy wintering population of ducks, especially scaup, blue-winged teal, shoveler, and baldpate, in the Louisiana area, devastated in August 1957 by Hurricane Audrey, is the reason the Flyway total population remained fairly constant in spite of the losses in the favorite species. The hurricane, which killed many and laid waste to considerable territory, also changed the coastal marshes into one of the most fabulous feeding grounds for waterfowl of all times. The recent concentrations here are probably made at the expense of other wintering areas.

The decline in Canada goose population is of some concern to waterfowl specialists since the present goose level is the lowest since 1954. The poor showing of the various species of ducks had been expected because of the severe drought over most of the breeding grounds. An absence of young ducks in last fall's flight was noticed by many experienced hunters who also found the adults gun-shy and difficult to entice over the decoys.

Failure of canvasback and redhead ducks to hold their own was disappointing to officials and hunters alike, since these species have received special protection during the past two years. In 1959 only one of either was allowed in the daily bag limit which for most other ducks was four. This confirms the earlier forecasts that the production of these species was almost a complete failure.

The midwinter waterfowl survey is conducted annually throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico by a corps of experienced observers provided by the Provincial, State and Federal conservation agencies. The massive operation is coordinated by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. In the 14 Mississippi Flyway States, extending from Minnesota to Ohio in the north and Louisiana to Alabama in the south, 764 observers traveled more than 73,000 miles in obtaining the information reported above.

Results of this survey, along with information from breeding ground surveys, measurements of hunter-kill and the analysis of banding data are used in setting the annual waterfowl hunting regulations.

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