



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DUCK FLIGHTS EXPECTED "ABOUT LIKE LAST YEAR" IN THREE FLYWAYS; DOWN IN PACIFIC

Duck flights in the Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic Flyways this year are expected to be approximately equivalent to those of last year, the Department of the Interior reported today.

This will depend, however, on duck production in Saskatchewan and Manitoba living up to expectations. Present indications are that the Pacific Flyway will be less fortunate because of unfavorable conditions on the breeding grounds which supply that area.

Meanwhile, breeding populations of important species in all flyways were down this year, and only in the three eastern flyways was the hatch sufficient to offset this decline.

These were the key points in a summary of conditions made today by the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

The Committee is meeting in the Department of the Interior Building today and tomorrow on matters relative to migratory waterfowl.

The first portion of today's session was given over to general discussion of breeding ground conditions in the United States and Canada, and reports of the findings of survey flights by Fish and Wildlife Service personnel and other cooperators. Succeeding sessions will pertain to the pending regulations for the approaching hunting season.

The redhead and canvasback are still in short supply. The winter survey showed that both of these species were down from last year and well below the five-year average in numbers. Breeding ground conditions were better this year, but although production was improved somewhat over last year, the flight of each of these species this fall will be low enough to remain a matter of real concern.

There is an encouraging note to Atlantic hunters in the 20 percent increase in the wintering population of black ducks. However, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists point out, the current population is still considerably below the peak level of 1955.

A brief summary by flyways follows:

Pacific--There seems to be little question that the flight in 1959 was considerably below that of 1958, and it is estimated that there will be a pronounced decrease in 1960 compared with 1959. The kill figures for 1959 indicated a 40 percent reduction in the harvest compared with 1958, but in spite of this reduction the wintering population was 18 percent down from the previous year. Most of the important species were reduced in numbers on the wintering areas, particularly mallard and pintail which usually make up more than 60 percent of the kill. Weather conditions in the breeding areas supplying Pacific Flyway ducks varied from average to poor. A large number of the Southern Alberta ponds were shallow and soon went dry resulting in unsuccessful nesting. It was dry, also, in Oregon, southern Idaho, northern California, Nevada, southern Utah, and most of Wyoming.

As a result of these unfavorable breeding ground conditions, production in most of the northern areas important to the Pacific Flyway decreased. This included Alaska, the Northwest Territories, and southern Alberta. In the case of the latter, survey crews reported production the lowest since surveys were begun.

There is little change in the over-all goose population. A 20 percent decrease in Canada geese is compensated by increases in whitefronts and cacklers. There will be a small increase in the Great Basin goose this year. There will be a small decrease in brant because of unfavorable conditions in the brant breeding areas in Alaska. There will be little change in the coot flight.

Central--The fall flight of ducks will be about the same as last year. The flight of Canada geese will be about the same as last year; there will be little change in whitefronts and a moderate increase in snows and blues. The coot flight also will be somewhat larger.

The winter survey showed a decrease in wintering population despite a 42 percent decrease in the kill during the 1959-1960 hunting season. Decreases in the wintering population of all important species were noted, including mallard, pintail, and green-winged teal which collectively make up about three-quarters of the flyway kill. Water conditions in the breeding areas were poor to good. There were large increases in the water areas early in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, but most of it was shallow and the potholes dried, making nesting unsuccessful. In other portions of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Dakotas, and Nebraska, water conditions were very good.

There were decreases in production in Northwest Territories and northern Alberta. Southern Alberta production also was down. However, production in southern Saskatchewan, the Dakotas, and Nebraska was up substantially over 1959. These increases are expected to balance the decreases.

Mississippi--The over-all flight of ducks during the fall will be about the same as last year. The winter survey showed little change in the total duck population, but the mallard population was down 24 percent. This is considered highly significant since the mallard alone usually comprises 60 percent of the kill in this flyway. The May breeding ground survey in the nesting areas important to the Mississippi Flyway also confirmed the fact that the mallard breeding population was reduced. Conditions were good in some portions of the breeding grounds, and the July production surveys revealed increases over last year in a number of important areas. As in the Central Flyway, these increases were expected to offset declines in breeding populations.

The Canada goose wintering population is down, but the fall flight is expected to be about the same as last year. There will be a moderate increase in the flight of snow geese and blue geese. There will be a small increase in coots.

Atlantic--The over-all flight of ducks is expected to be about the same as last year. There is a promising increase in the wintering population of black ducks, but the population is still well below that of 1955.

Because of the lack of well-developed surveys in the important Quebec-Labrador breeding area, it is not possible to place the same reliance upon breeding ground data in predicting Atlantic Flyway flights as on the other flyways. From the data available, there is little reason to expect an increase in production this year. Breeding areas in the prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories which supply the bulk of the mallard, pintail, teal, and canvasback started off the current season with a reduced breeding population. Better production, however, was expected to offset these losses in the flights from these areas.

No change is expected in the flight of Canada geese and the brant. There will probably be a slight increase in the coot flight.

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