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WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY COMPLETED

A survey to determine habitat conditions and the distribution of ducks, geese, swans, and coot on major waterfowl wintering areas throughout North America has just been completed, the Department of the Interior announced today.

Observers from State game departments and Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife conducted the annual survey using airplanes, boats, and automobiles. As in previous years the Armed Services and Coast Guard were active cooperators, supplying planes and pilots where needed.

In the Pacific Flyway, which lies west of the Continental Divide, flood conditions in some areas coincided with severe winter conditions in others to cause a non-typical distribution of birds.

On the southern end of both the Atlantic Flyway, which includes States east of the Appalachian Mountains, and the Mississippi Flyway, which extends from the Appalachians to the Great Plains, heavy rains flooded most of the hardwood-timbered river bottoms. Large numbers of ducks moved into these flooded woodlands to feed on acorns and other foods.

Exceptionally low water in Laguna Madre along the Texas and Mexican coasts apparently caused a major decline in the number of scaup and redhead ducks normally seen in this area.

Wintering waterfowl habitat averaged from good to excellent over most of the Continent.

A total of 29,110,496 birds was tallied by the waterfowl observers. These included 18,314,857 puddle ducks such as mallards and pintails, 3,837,025 diving ducks which includes canvasback and scaup, and 2,987,732 geese. Also observed were 181,600 American brant, 165,770 black brant, 3,155,359 coots, 96,818 whistling swans, and 555 of the rare trumpeter swans.

In the Atlantic Flyway the observers saw 829,100 puddle ducks, 1,503,600 diving ducks, and 529,400 geese. This Flyway was the leader in numbers of diving ducks observed. The total number of waterfowl seen in the Atlantic Flyway was 3,510,700.

In the Mississippi Flyway 9,552,639 birds were tallied by the observers. Of this total 7,043,037 were puddle ducks and 739,159 were divers. The largest numbers of geese were observed in the Mississippi Flyway with 888,174 being counted.

Waterfowl observed in the Central Flyway, the Plains States west to the Continental Divide, plus the east coast and central highlands of Mexico totaled 6,282,400. There were 3,335,600 puddle ducks, 784,500 diving ducks, and 714,800 geese observed in the Central Flyway.

The Pacific Flyway, which for survey purposes took in the west coast of Mexico, had the highest number of birds observed with a total of 9,764,757. This included 7,107,120 puddle ducks, 809,766 divers, and 855,358 geese.

Under the best of conditions the winter survey is not an accurate measurement of annual waterfowl population changes because of yearly differences in visibility conditions, a major shifting of populations from one habitat type to another, changes in observers, variations in weather and other factors. Experience has shown that the best information for setting annual waterfowl hunting regulations comes from a survey of waterfowl populations and production carried out each spring and summer on the Continent's major waterfowl breeding grounds.

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