

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release October 24, 1975

McGarvey 202/343-5634

CANVASBACK AND REDHEAD DUCKS INCREASE IN NUMBERS

Canvasback and redhead ducks appear to have enjoyed population increases recently, allowing some easing of the tight restrictions on hunting these species that have been in effect in recent years, Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced.

Canvasbacks showed up last spring in numbers well above the average for recent years on the pothole breeding country of Canada and the North Central United States. Redhead numbers also were above average. Since annual production of both species is dependent on prairie water levels, the outlook is for a better than average fall flight for this species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service places relatively little weight on year to year fluctuations in canvasback and redhead populations, preferring instead to rely upon long-term trends to monitor changes. By these standards, however, populations of both species have improved to the point where an easing of the hunting restrictions in effect since 1972 is now considered biologically sound.

Canvasbacks and redheads are diving ducks that typically gather in large numbers on open water of lakes, shallow bays, and estuaries. Canvasbacks traditionally winter on the Chesapeake Bay on the Atlantic Coast, in San Pablo Bay along the Pacific Coast, and in the South Central States. Redheads gather in the Laguna Madre of Texas and offshore along the Gulf Coast States. Both ducks start their migration in early October, stopping at favored lakes enroute.

(over)

Canvasbacks and redheads nest in the prairie region of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba and the States of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota. A suitable nest site and water levels usually determine the success or failure of reproduction. Canvasbacks and redheads nest over water in clumps of bulrushes, cattails, or other plants. Dead plant material from the previous year is used for building nests. The burning or overgrazing of wetlands often destroys plants needed for successful nesting. Drainage of wetlands has been a curse to diving ducks and other wildlife in general. The deeper permanent marshes of Iowa and Minnesota once produced thousands of redheads annually. This diver production was greatly diminished by demands of agricultural drainage and our 20th century civilization

The nationwide cooperation of waterfowl hunters was a major factor in the recovery of canvasbacks and redheads. A nationwide ban on the hunting of both species was imposed in 1972 because of their declining numbers. Along the East Coast the Atlantic Flyway Council chose a flyway-wide closure for 1972 through 1974. In 1973, the area closure concept was implemented in the Pacific, Central, and Mississippi Flyways. This approach involved closing hunting for canvasbacks and redheads in areas where the two species traditionally gather in large numbers and are hunted during the autumn. Records from the national waterfowl harvest surveys were used to identify the areas for closure.

The taking of canvasbacks and redheads is prohibited in their high concentration areas such as the Chesapeake Bay, but in other areas where they show up in few numbers hunters are limited to one canvasback or one redhead where conventional regulations apply.

Redhead populations have improved to the extent that a few of the previously closed areas will be open this year. These spots are limited to the mid and lower Gulf Coast of Texas and offshore areas of western Florida. Hunters will be allowed to take a minimal number. In the Pacific Flyway all formerly closed areas are being opened and hunters will be permitted to take two canvasbacks or two redheads, or one of each. This can be done because canvasback and redhead populations which winter in the Pacific Flyway appear to have better reproductive success than birds which winter elsewhere.

x x x