



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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1990 BREEDING DUCK POPULATIONS HOLD ON NEAR LAST YEAR'S LEVEL; NESTING HABITAT SHOWS SOME IMPROVEMENT

Numbers of breeding ducks in the United States and Canada remain at low levels, with the 1990 spring population virtually unchanged from last year, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

"Severe drought and continued destruction of wetlands have hit wild ducks with a devastating one-two punch," said John Turner, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The status of ducks is a warning signal for wetlands and the many fish and wildlife species that depend on them. These numbers should be of concern not only to waterfowlers and birdwatchers, but to everyone who cares about wildlife and the environment. They underscore the pressing need to save our remaining wetlands as proposed by President Bush."

The breeding population for ducks in all surveyed areas totalled 31.3 million, up 1 percent from last year's 30.9 million. The 1990 count is the third lowest on record, after 1985 and 1989. Overall, duck populations in the surveyed areas are 22 percent below the 1955-89 average.

Blue-winged teal reached another record low, declining to 2.8 million, 11 percent below last year's count and 41 percent below the long-term average for the species. Mallards also continued to decline, numbering 5.9 million, 4 percent below last year's 6.1 million and 27 percent below average. Mallard numbers in the north central states were the lowest ever recorded, reflecting the severe drought conditions there. The number of scaup reached an all-time low for the second consecutive year and remain 23 percent below average.

Pintail numbers improved slightly (up 5 percent) from last year, but their numbers are still 52 percent below the average for the past 35 years.

The news is better for canvasbacks, which increased 22 percent from last year and are now 7 percent above average. Of

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the 10 species included in the survey, only gadwall, northern shoveler, and green-winged teal increased significantly since 1989; and only green-wings (+38 percent) and gadwall (+16 percent) are substantially above their long-term averages. American wigeon and redhead numbers are similar to last year and continue to be below the long-term average (-15 percent and -16 percent, respectively).

Severe drought conditions continued this spring in the north central United States, and returning birds found little useable habitat there. Pond counts in North Dakota reached an all-time low. Overall, survey biologists counted 46 percent fewer ponds than last year in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana.

Water conditions improved significantly in prairie Canada, however. Total pond numbers increased 66 percent from last year, but remained 20 percent below the long-term average. The largest gain in pond numbers was observed in southern Manitoba, followed by southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta.

Despite the improved water conditions in prairie Canada, overall habitat quality remains poor in many areas. Ducks and other migratory birds need abundant natural vegetation near ponds for nesting cover, but many of the pond margins observed by survey biologists have been plowed right up to the water's edge, leaving no quality habitat for waterfowl and other birds. The prairie pothole regions of the United States and Canada are important habitat for more than 200 bird species.

The breeding duck population estimates represent the largest wildlife census in the world. The counts are based on aerial and ground surveys of prime nesting habitat in the U.S. and Canada, conducted by biologists of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Canadian Wildlife Service, and cooperating provinces and states.

Following is a table of breeding populations for 10 species of ducks in surveyed areas.

Table 3. Breeding population estimates for 10 species of ducks, 1955-90 (in thousands)*.

Year	Mallard	Gadwall	American wigeon	Green- winged teal	Blue- winged teal	Northern shoveler	Northern pintail	Redhead	Canvasback	Scaup
1955	10,345	1,106	3,333	2,076	6,436	1,965	9,251	733	595	7,100
1956	11,711	1,202	3,712	1,898	6,267	2,084	10,124	928	692	6,595
1957	10,946	1,102	3,208	1,293	5,449	1,744	6,856	684	600	6,535
1958	12,904	687	3,372	1,618	5,799	1,515	6,889	524	713	6,040
1959	10,292	683	3,779	3,153	5,300	1,649	7,228	641	481	8,220
1960	8,206	873	3,165	1,630	4,303	1,859	5,769	542	575	5,566
1961	8,290	1,422	3,219	2,216	4,833	1,625	4,860	437	396	6,764
1962	6,144	1,610	2,721	1,119	3,890	1,633	4,299	664	385	6,398
1963	7,360	1,578	2,209	1,754	4,587	1,435	4,361	396	523	6,564
1964	6,974	1,223	2,630	2,051	4,943	1,685	4,111	560	658	6,326
1965	5,948	1,692	2,695	1,526	4,628	1,607	4,301	568	505	5,383
1966	7,401	1,976	2,901	2,219	5,616	2,272	5,777	747	683	5,421
1967	8,205	1,638	2,637	1,944	4,715	2,244	5,870	846	556	5,877
1968	7,586	2,098	2,783	1,805	3,697	1,811	4,225	502	557	5,971
1969	8,065	1,837	3,192	1,991	4,514	2,150	6,390	759	530	6,338
1970	10,379	1,698	3,752	2,259	5,633	2,269	7,004	834	601	6,930
1971	9,843	1,733	3,425	2,352	5,426	2,052	6,291	693	441	6,149
1972	9,867	1,776	3,428	2,407	5,673	2,505	7,875	489	429	9,527
1973	8,781	1,198	3,665	2,444	4,866	1,657	5,114	754	696	7,535
1974	7,392	1,562	3,003	2,221	5,437	2,060	7,165	613	493	7,045
1975	8,109	1,672	2,862	2,038	6,441	1,994	6,387	974	706	7,846
1976	8,637	1,478	2,699	1,844	5,023	1,818	6,045	946	686	6,973
1977	8,226	1,546	2,678	1,952	4,626	1,616	4,971	688	702	7,490
1978	7,695	1,593	3,808	2,978	4,497	2,162	5,664	833	423	7,125
1979	8,444	1,889	3,388	2,920	5,278	2,555	6,070	774	606	9,135
1980	8,003	1,459	3,857	2,925	4,903	2,050	5,420	1,146	688	7,690
1981	6,757	1,479	3,555	2,515	4,076	2,403	4,227	825	594	7,253
1982	6,684	1,690	3,159	2,247	3,879	2,540	4,112	674	543	6,549
1983	7,107	1,536	2,923	2,574	3,381	2,237	4,086	866	528	8,788
1984	5,974	1,799	3,979	1,804	3,870	2,222	3,664	849	569	8,402
1985	5,475	1,410	2,506	1,873	3,756	1,925	2,935	701	411	6,235
1986	6,303	1,590	2,446	2,588	4,664	2,403	3,201	956	442	6,252
1987	6,691	1,705	2,734	3,041	3,618	2,229	3,137	767	478	6,261
1988	6,550	1,528	3,168	3,143	3,652	2,157	2,577	846	435	5,480
1989	6,119	1,423	2,577	2,697	3,199	1,636	2,471	628	488	5,299
1990	5,897	1,745	2,659	3,032	2,832	1,904	2,590	606	593	5,277
Goals**	8,700	1,600	3,300	2,300	5,300	2,100	6,300	760	580	7,600
1955-89 Avg.	8,098	1,500	3,119	2,203	4,768	1,993	5,392	725	555	6,830
Percent Change in 1990 From:										
1989	-4	+23	+3	+12	-11	+16	+5	-4	+22	NC
1955-89 Avg.	-27	+16	-15	+38	-41	-4	-52	-16	+7	-23

* All duck indexes adjusted for visibility bias.

** Breeding duck population goals, from North American Waterfowl Management Plan (FWS-CWS 1986).