



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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1991 WATERFOWL FALL FLIGHT FORECAST: NO MAJOR CHANGES
FROM LAST YEAR

The number of ducks migrating south this fall is expected to be similar to last year in all regions of the country, according to the 1991 "fall flight forecast" by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The outlook for geese is favorable, with most goose populations experiencing good nesting conditions.

"After nearly a decade of drought, we've finally got some water in the ponds," said John Turner, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Unfortunately, many of the ponds don't have much surrounding natural vegetation that ducks need to nest and hide from predators. We need to continue efforts under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to make sure there is secure, quality nesting cover for waterfowl."

Significant amounts of rain fell in late spring across much of the Canadian and U.S. prairies where most ducks nest. The number of ponds counted in July by survey crews was the highest on record. The rain fell too late in the season to benefit most nesting ducks, but mallards are expected to increase slightly.

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Numbers of most Canada goose populations this fall are expected to be similar to last year. An exception is the southern James Bay population (formerly called the Tennessee Valley population) that winters in Kentucky, Tennessee, northern Alabama, northwestern Pennsylvania, and western North Carolina and South Carolina. This population will experience another below-average fall flight. The fall flight of giant Canada geese is expected to exceed last year's.

The fall flight of greater white-fronted geese in the Pacific Flyway (wintering in California's Central Valley) will increase slightly over recent years but remains below desired levels. The populations wintering in Louisiana and Texas will be similar in size to last year.

The fall flight of lesser snow geese in the mid-continent region of the Mississippi and Central flyways is expected to reach a record high this year. Lesser snow geese in the western Central Flyway (wintering in southeastern Colorado, New Mexico, and the Texas Panhandle) and those wintering in central and southern California should equal or exceed last year's.

The fall flight of Ross' geese (wintering in northern and central California, New Mexico, and along the Texas Gulf Coast) should increase over last year. Populations of Atlantic and Pacific brant and both eastern and western tundra swans are also expected to equal or exceed last year's.

This year, the Fish and Wildlife Service improved the method of estimating duck numbers to take into account changes in prairie habitat conditions and improvements in waterfowl surveys. This year's duck fall flight index, using the new procedures, is projected at 60 million. This is not significantly different from last year's revised projection of 57 million. The fall flight index does not represent an actual count of birds, but is a projection based on surveys of duck breeding populations and estimates of brood production. Waterfowl biologists regard the duck breeding population estimate as a more accurate and reliable figure than the fall flight index. This year's duck breeding population estimate totalled 26.5 million, up 6 percent from last year but remaining 19 percent below the average from 1955-90.