



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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CAUSE OF "DUCK SICKNESS" TO BE FURTHER STUDIED

The problem of the great mortality among wild fowl in our Western States, which has puzzled biologists and sportsmen for a number of years, is to receive renewed and intensified study during the present season by the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. C. C. Sperry, assistant biologist of that bureau, will be sent, at the first indication of serious duck mortality, to make a detailed investigation of the malady in order to determine the causative agent wherever possible.

The "duck sickness" is recognized as an outstanding menace to waterfowl in Western States. Although alkali poisoning has been found by the Biological Survey to be the cause at Great Salt Lake, Utah, and at some other western points, bird mortality has been encountered in other localities where the cause has not been definitely determined. For instance, it is not known to what extent alkali poisoning has resulted in the death of many thousands of wild ducks and other birds at Tule Lake, Calif., the Government Sump at Klamath Lake, Oreg., and at Malheur Lake, Oreg. There have been times when all circumstances pointed to alkali poisoning, and on other occasions investigations have been unable definitely to associate the trouble with the presence of these poisonous salts. Mr. Sperry will undertake to determine, through careful experimental work, whether the causative agent rests in alkaline salts, and if so he will make recommendations for practicable remedial measures.

With the possibility that bacterial disease may be playing an important part in the recurrence of the duck sickness, the Biological Survey will continue to work in cooperation with several leading pathologists and bacteriologists in the West who in the past have assisted in the study of the problem.

Naturally, intensive study of the disease must be confined to the few localities where there is likelihood of great mortality. It is highly essential, however, for a full understanding of the problem that all possible information concerning outbreaks, even though limited in extent, be assembled. For this reason the Biological Survey requests that sportsmen and others encountering instances of wild-fowl mortality report them immediately, either to field officials of the Bureau of Biological Survey or directly to the bureau at Washington, D. C.

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