# INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS

## United States Department of Agriculture

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BULLETIN OF WILDLIFE BUREAU
DESCRIBES FOOD OF GAME DUCKS

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More than 200 kinds of plants and animals are eaten by game ducks in the United States and Canada, according to the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Analyzing almost 8,000 stomachs of 18 duck species, Biological Survey scientists have found that about three-fourths of the food content is plant material. Pondweeds, bulrushes, and smartweeds rank first, second, and third, respectively, in the plant food list, while snails and insects head the list of the animal foods.

An awakened public interest in the restoration of waterfowl, the Biological Survey states, calls for dependable information on which to base programs for the improvement of breeding and feeding grounds. Essential information on improving feeding grounds is given in a technical bulletin recently issued by the Department of Agriculture on "Food of Game Ducks in the United States and Canada."

Basing their findings on almost 40 years of research by Biological Survey workers in the field and laboratories, the authors, A. C. Martin and F. M. Uhler, discuss each game duck food in detail, showing among other things its range, value and means of identification; the best methods of propagation, harvesting, and storing; and favorable and unfavorable factors in waterfowl foodplant culture.

Farmers, conservationists, and sportsmen desiring to cultivate duck food plants are warned that one of the most frequent causes of failure in propagation is neglect in considering the natural ranges of species or varieties of plants used. These ranges are often dependent on climatic, soil, or water conditions

that are different from those of the site to be improved. The new bulletin includes 126 plant-range maps.

"Careful selection of seed stock," the authors say, "with due regard to origin and quality, is a cardinal principle in successful agriculture, and is just as important in aquiculture." They point out that because a variety or strain of plant grows well in one place, it does not necessarily follow that the strain will grow well in other areas. The species selected for propagation must not only be suitable for food, but must also be capable of growing in the area. Propagators of marsh and aquatic plants are urged to have a study made of the area proposed for development. This may forestall the use of unsuitable places or the planting of species already there.

Sago pondweed is probably the most important single waterfowl food plant on the continent, and is responsible for about half of the total food credited to the group of pondweeds. Muskgrasses are eaten by many kinds of waterfowl and are particularly sought by diving ducks. It is sometimes claimed, however, that the plants produce an unfavorable flavor in the flesh of ducks that eat them.

About one-fourth of the total food eaten by North American game ducks consists of animal material. Mollusks and insects are of outstanding importance in the animal food. Of the mollusks, snails and bivalves are particularly selected, and are of greatest importance in the coastal regions. Snails and most of the bivalves are of little economic significance. Insects represent nearly a tenth of the total food volume.

A color plate by E. R. Kalmbach, of the Biological Survey, shows pintail ducks feeding on aquatic vegetation, and 10 drawings of plant foods by Martin are included in the 137 text figures. About 250 photographs of food specimens and of duck areas illustrating various food conditions are shown on plates.

"Food of Game Ducks in the United States and Canada," Technical Bulletin No. 634, may be obtained at 40 cents a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.



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