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WILD DUCKS IN MIGRATION
FOLLOW ANCESTRAL ROUTES

When the ducks now wintering in the United States wing their ways to breeding grounds in the North, they will follow routes established by their ancestors, and when the birds return next fall each group will come again to the same region where its ancestors found wintering grounds, and by the same route the ancestors flew, according to F. C. Lincoln, naturalist of the U. S. Biological Survey.

The birds, Mr. Lincoln explains, have naturally and over the ages developed their many routes of travel into four main systems. From north to south the migration routes come together in four definite geographic regions, called flyways. These four flyways are designated the Atlantic, the Mississippi, the Central, and the Pacific.

This means that the sportsmen along each of these flyways will have to protect their own ducks from their fellow shooters in that particular flyway. The same kind of ducks may be flying northward in another flyway, but the young these other ducks rear in Canada will not fly south by any route except the one the parents used. Three families of ducks may nest in the same marsh in northern Canada, but when the southward migration starts the 3 groups will not fly together, but both the old and the young ducks will go south by the same routes that the parents flew in coming north. Too much killing of ducks in one flyway will ruin the sport in that flyway, and shooters cannot expect to benefit much from

conservation efforts in some other flyway. For practical purposes the duck flyways are just as separate as if they were fenced off by mile-high woven wire.

This knowledge of the migratory habits of ducks, based on bird-banding and other information, is of great significance to conservationists, says Mr. Lincoln. The ducks, he explains, are so strongly influenced by their ancestral lanes of migration that they will continue to follow them even though conditions en route or on the wintering grounds become unfavorable.

If the birds should be exterminated in any one of our four major flyways, it would at best be a long time, Mr. Lincoln predicts, before that region could be repopulated, even though birds of the same species should continue to return over other flyways to their great breeding grounds of the North.

Today, the naturalist points out, we have indisputable evidence that the waterfowl of North America have seriously decreased in numbers throughout the continent and, consequently, that we must take special precautions to prevent the extermination of these valuable species. In the light, however, of what we have learned about the birds' attachment for their ancestral flyways, Mr. Lincoln declares, we must go far enough to prevent the extermination of the species in any one of the four major flyways. Every sportsman, he says, must stand willing to make special sacrifices, if need be, to spare the birds that fly back and forth over the ancestral flyway of the waterfowl that come to his own hunting grounds.

Mr. Lincoln's report on the flyways and their significance has been published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture as Circular 342-C, entitled "The Waterfowl Flyways of North America." Copies can be obtained at 5 cents each from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.