



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of Information
Press Service



WASHINGTON, D. C.

1016
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B. S.

Release - Immediate

July 6, 1936.

MORE DUCKS ON NESTING GROUNDS,
BUT NOT ENOUGH, SAYS GABRIELSON

More wild ducks returned to their northern nesting grounds this year, than in 1935, but the gain in numbers isn't great enough to justify any let-up in the program to restore the former great flights of migratory waterfowl, says Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Chief of the U. S. Bureau of Biological Survey. Last fall the open season was shortened to 30 days with heavy restrictions on bag limits, the taking of certain species, and methods of hunting.

Dr. Gabrielson, in a recent address at Chicago, Ill., before the Illinois Sportsmen's Association, urged continued stringent restrictions for several years on the hunting of ducks and geese. He said this year is the first time estimates by the Biological Survey have shown an increase over the previous year in the number of birds returning to their northern nesting grounds. Other estimates made by conservation organizations and interested groups agree substantially with those of the Survey.

"The drastic restrictions put into force last year," explained Dr. Gabrielson, "were intended to cut down the kill by hunters, and they accomplished that purpose. Only by restricting the kill will we be able to send more birds back each year to our newly created breeding grounds and to the Canadian areas where breeding birds are still deficient.

"We have a fair chance of restoring the migratory waterfowl flight to great numbers if the hunters will be sportsmen enough to stand for a restriction

of the kill for a few years at least, and give the Bureau a chance to complete its program of building refuges for these birds. We must have marshes where the ducks may feed, rest, and breed, but first we must have the ducks."

At present the Biological Survey has 2,000,000 acres in process of development as migratory waterfowl refuges. About 5,000,000 more acres are needed, the Bureau says, to care for the birds while they are in this country. In addition to the breeding grounds the Bureau hopes to establish resting and feeding grounds every 100 miles along each of the four major flyways, and wintering grounds in California and along the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic coast. In Canada some restoration of the nesting grounds may be necessary in the future to complete this program. At present, however, these Canadian areas have less than half the ducks they can support as a result of the steady decline in their number.

"Thus far the program has called for an expenditure of \$15,000,000 in Federal funds," Dr. Gabrielson explained. "This is the greatest sum the Government ever put into anything for the benefit of sportsmen and conservationists.

"If the ducks are exterminated while this program is being developed the marshes will be useless to sportsmen and the funds spent by Federal and State Governments will have been wasted. Furthermore, should a group or groups of sportsmen upset this program, the Biological Survey can not be held responsible for the inevitable destruction of waterfowl hunting for all time.

"However, I can not believe that the sportsmen will let it come to that. We are receiving the hearty cooperation of most sportsmen, especially from those in communities in which the refuges are being developed. They in turn are encouraging others to save the sport of duck hunting for future generations."