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DUCK LOSSES IN DROUGHT REGION  
MAY BE OFFSET BY GAIN IN CANADA

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Wild ducks perished by the hundreds the last few weeks at small-water holes in the drought region of the northern Great Plains. These losses, however, may be offset by the increase in the number of ducks this year in Canada, reports to the U. S. Biological Survey indicate.

Field parties of the Biological Survey in close touch with the waterfowl situation report that large broods have been hatched out in the northern breeding grounds in Canada. Last spring the migrations to Canada were somewhat larger than in 1935 -- due largely to the severe restrictions on waterfowl hunting in the United States last fall.

Breeding grounds in Canada showing effects of the drought are in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. This region borders on the United States drought area and losses of young ducks there may run as high as 50 percent, reports indicate. At some of the small-water hole areas in the Dakotas losses as high as 90 percent have been reported. Heavy losses have also occurred in Montana.

Officials of the survey believe, however, that the increase in the number of ducks in the northern part of their breeding range is perhaps large enough to offset the heavy losses in the drought region.

The officials point out that the breeding grounds in the drought area represents about one-sixth of the continental breeding range, and that much of the breeding range in the Dakotas had been seriously affected by droughts in recent years

as well as by the present drought. Last spring, however, conditions for waterfowl in these States were much improved. Waterholes had been filled by spring rains and the northern migration of waterfowl along the Mississippi flyway was larger than in 1935. Large broods were hatched out, but many of these have been wiped out by the drought.

Hundreds of young ducks and many adult birds have been rescued the last few weeks from the dry areas in these States and transferred to refuges and large bodies of water by CCC workers, sportsmen, game officials, and local residents. More than 2,000 ducks were recently removed from a region of dry pot-holes southwest of Minot, N. D., by CCC workers from Biological Survey camps. Most of the birds rescued in this region were pintails and shovelers. Other species saved were mallards, bald-pates, redheads, canvasbacks, and teals.

Large numbers of dead birds at dried-up pot-holes are a common sight, say CCC workers and others engaged in rescue work. In searching for ducks the CCC men spread out in open formation and cover an area several times to avoid overlooking any birds. The captured birds are then placed into trucks and liberated at refuges or large bodies of water. The ducks are easily caught as they are usually too weak to fly far.

Many of the Bureau's refuges in the drought area are in good condition and contain enough water to keep them in good shape until September. Thousands of ducks caught by the drought at small-water holes have flocked into these refuges.

A graphic account of how the drought has affected wildlife in the area surrounding the Arrowwood Migratory Waterfowl refuge north of Jamestown, N. D., is contained in a letter written to the Biological Survey by a foreman of a CCC camp near the refuge. The letter says in part:

"Along the one lake (Arrowwood) in this area that is not dry scores of dead birds can be found that apparently reached the water completely exhausted. During the past week I have seen several hundred dead birds of 17 different kinds including owls, hawks, crows, songbirds, sparrows, swallows, and numerous baby ducks. Last Monday when we were opening a dormant spring in the dry Jim Lake nine different kinds of birds including three kinds of water birds swarmed in around the legs and feet of the boys to get water. Many of them were too fatigued to move after they had watered.

"We developed six dormant springs in this manner and I am sure that the birds watering there daily can be numbered by the thousands. On one occasion about sundown we saw hundreds of jack rabbits in a mass formation coming to the water hole area. In regions where there is no water the 'jacks' are dying in large numbers."