



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



WASHINGTON, D. C.

RELEASE FOR PUBLICATION
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1936

CITES SERIOUS DECREASE OF
CANVASBACK, REDHEAD DUCKS

Chief Gabrielson of Biological Survey
Explains Need for Close Season

(SEE MAP ON LAST PAGE)

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For the first time in the history of the United States it is illegal to shoot canvasback and redhead ducks at any time. The new migratory waterfowl hunting regulations recently announced for this season by the U. S. Biological Survey place these waterfowl on the list of fully protected species, and the Survey is making every possible effort to promote enforcement of the new regulation.

"Canvasbacks and redheads", says Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Chief of the Biological Survey, "have seriously decreased in numbers despite the restrictions provided by previous hunting regulations. In recent years they have been especially hard-hit because much of their breeding territory is in the region that has been visited by droughts."

These two diving ducks are the most palatable of all game birds, say many wildfowlers. During the days of heavy market hunting canvasbacks sometimes sold as high as \$10 to \$12 a pair, or brace, in large Eastern cities. So popular was the hunting of these ducks that the decrease in their numbers throughout their breeding areas in the North Central States began as early as in the '50's and '60's.

Yet many sportsmen, even today, accustomed to seeing good-sized flocks of canvasbacks in the fall along the Chesapeake Bay and the eastern shore of the United States, are asking, "Why stop the shooting of canvasbacks?" They point out that

last fall it was estimated more than 200,000 canvasbacks were concentrated at one time on the Susquahanna River flats in Maryland.

"This is indeed a large raft of ducks," says Dr. Gabrielson, "but it must be remembered that the concentration on the Susquahanna Flats last fall represented a very large percentage of all the canvasbacks left in the world. This number is far too small to provide adequate sport for the hunters and still leave enough breeding stock to repopulate the refuges in the North Central States and also the sparsely inhabited breeding grounds in Canada."

Thousands of mallards, pintails, and other ducks rest, nest, and feed on the refuges established by the Biological Survey, but the scarcity of canvasbacks and redheads on these northern refuges where so many other ducks breed shows plainly the need of special protection for these species. These refuges, records of the Survey show, could easily accommodate several times the number of canvasbacks and redheads that nested on them this year. Nevertheless, an inventory of canvasbacks and redheads made last spring and summer on several of the northern refuges does indicate that there are enough of these ducks left to serve as a nucleus for restoring them to great numbers, if they are adequately protected now.

Records of the Biological Survey show that these two species have never bred naturally in eastern North America. Their original breeding grounds extended from northern Nebraska across to Western Minnesota and north into the Canadian Prairie Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. A western contingent of these two ducks inhabits the great interior valley of California, northern Nevada and Utah, and a small area in southern British Columbia.

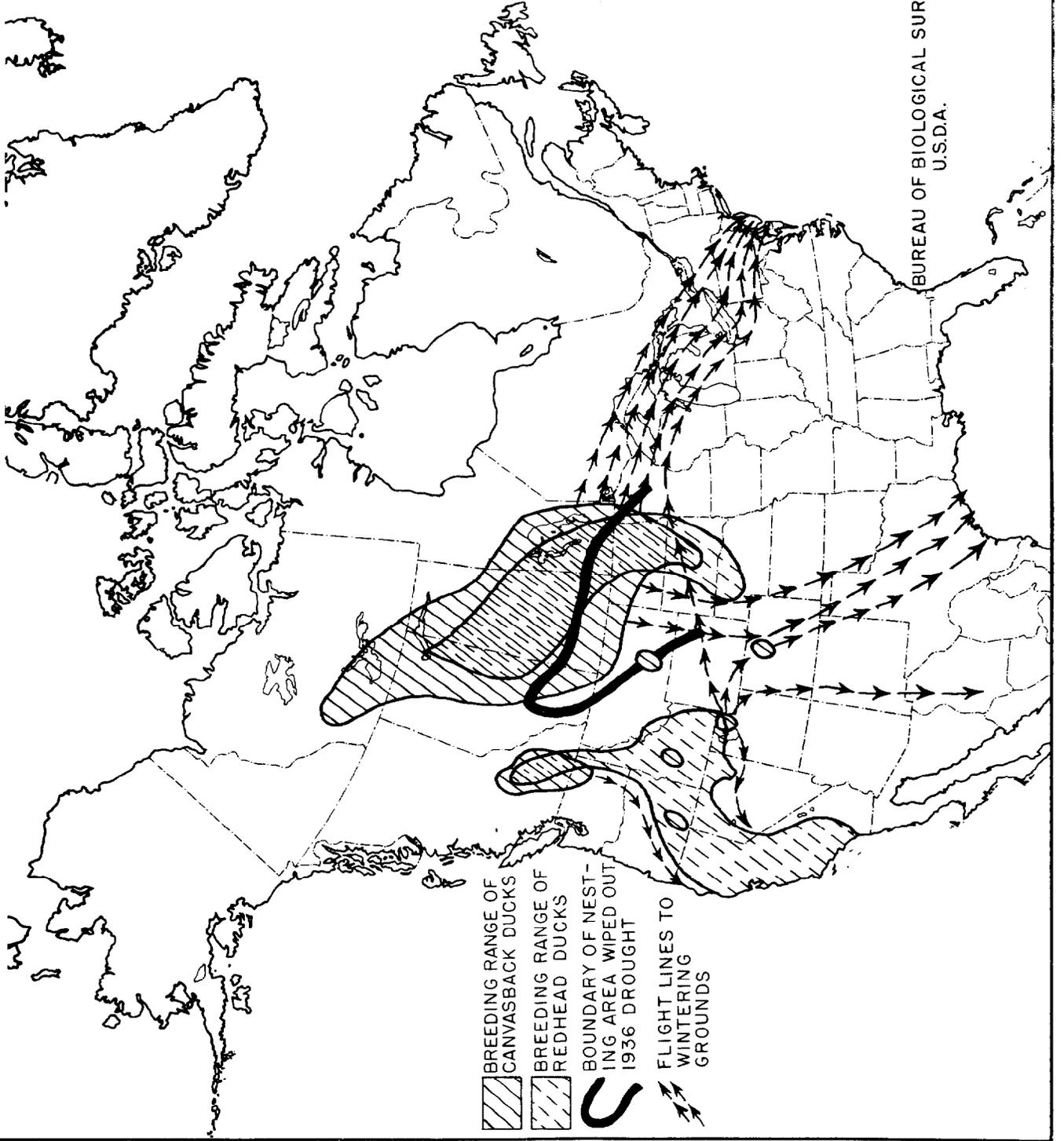
Neither of these two ducks has ever occupied the vast nesting grounds of northern Canada and Alaska. Their ancestral nesting places were in a region now devoted principally to agriculture. The drainage of prairie lakes, ponds, and

marshes in Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas destroyed thousands of acres of valuable habitat for these waterfowl. Likewise, the drainage of valleys in California and the drainage of lakes, ponds, and marshes in the Canadian Prairie Provinces destroyed a large part of their original nesting grounds. As a result both of these ducks even in 1920 were rare as breeding species in the United States. There were a few areas such as the Bear River marshes in Utah where they still bred in numbers, but elsewhere in this country only a few pairs were to be found. Practically all of their original breeding range that remained suitable was in Canada.

Last summer two field parties of the Biological Survey covered the remaining breeding grounds of these two ducks in the Canadian Prairie Provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Nowhere did these parties find more than a scattering of either canvasbacks or redheads. Last winter every important wintering ground in the United States and Mexico was carefully surveyed in making a waterfowl inventory, but nowhere was there a concentration even near the size of the one that was observed in the Susquehanna River flats.

"This does not necessarily mean that these ducks are on the verge of extinction," says Dr. Gabrielson. "With proper management and protection both may be brought back to a numerical strength that again will provide good shooting for sportsmen."

CANVASBACK AND REDHEAD MAP



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