



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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1-1/2 MILLION WATERFOWL WINTERING ON WHITE RIVER REFUGE IN ARKANSAS

About 1-1/2 million migratory waterfowl, principally wild ducks, are wintering on the White River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas this year, according to a Fish and Wildlife Service report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. Most of the birds are staying on the 170 lakes within the refuge boundary, but many are also found on the White River, which winds through the 117,000-acre wildlife sanctuary before merging with the Mississippi River.

Service officials estimate that about 90 percent of the birds are mallards, 5 percent pintails, and the remainder ring-necked ducks, baldpates, green-winged teals, wood ducks, black ducks, blue bills, and Canada geese.

"The Delta section of Arkansas is a favorite wintering spot with the migratory waterfowl in the Mississippi Flyway route" said Burton S. Webster, assistant to Refuge Manager Howard A. Miller. The assistant refuge manager pointed out that the Arkansas area is at the bottom of the "funnel" of the Mississippi Flyway. The migratory waterfowl coming from Canada and the

northern United States in this flight lane converge towards the mouth of the "funnel" and then spread out again farther south.

Observers have noted an increase in the number of Canada geese wintering on the White River Refuge this year.

"The increase in the number of geese in Arkansas this year is remarkable," D. N. Graves, director of the Arkansas Fish and Game Commission reported to Service officials. "And the ducks have also increased substantially. It is evident that the Fish and Wildlife Service refuge program is bearing fruit. The refuges, together with the program of waterfowl hunting regulations and law-enforcement should be given credit for the increase of waterfowl--at least in Arkansas."

Commenting about the wintering population of wild ducks and geese on the White River Refuge, the State official said:

"I have seen more ducks on the White River this year than I have ever seen in my life, and I hunted over what is now the refuge for many, many years."

Though the wildlife refuge has a large number of wintering waterfowl, Manager Miller hopes to be able to increase the total population of wild ducks and geese many times. Increasing the food supply will enable the refuge to support many more birds, the Service official said, and that is the principal problem to be solved now. The refuge is composed of fertile bottom land. It has been built up by the silt and clay deposited here when the White River floods the area.

The area is entirely forested, being a mixture of overcup oak, red oak, pecan, ash, red gum, sycamore, elm, hackberry, and other bottom land trees.

Because wild ducks are fond of the acorns of willow oak or "pin oak" as it is commonly called, the Service will attempt to reestablish large stands of that tree on the White River area. Already thousands of willow oak seedlings are being raised on a large nursery on the sanctuary. These seedlings will be transplanted throughout the refuge.

"Many individuals are surprised when they see 75,000 wild ducks and geese rising off one of our lakes," Miller said, "but that's nothing compared to what this refuge could sustain if the "pin oak" stands are developed here. The birds almost darken the sky now--they should blacken it later."