

The seal of the Department of the Interior, featuring a bison in a landscape with mountains and a sun, surrounded by the text "DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR".

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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For the second successive year the population of most species of wild ducks in the United States has drastically declined, Secretary of the Interior J. A. Krug announced today. The Secretary's pessimistic report was based upon results of the annual January inventory conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service and reported by its Director, Albert M. Day.

"The continental population of migratory waterfowl is about 25 percent under that of a year ago," declared Mr. Day, "even when due allowance has been made for the flocks that traveled to Cuba, Mexico, and other Caribbean and Latin-American wintering grounds. In other words, the population of ducks and geese is back to somewhere between that of 1941 and 1942."

"Although the waterfowl resource is by no means endangered, we must compensate for these losses," Mr. Day informed Secretary Krug. "It is obvious, therefore, that American sportsmen will be called upon next season to take a smaller portion of the 1946 crop so that more breeders can be permitted to fly north in the spring of 1947. Every effort is being made to provide and improve nesting and wintering habitats. Only by such long range planning can we preserve the sport of shooting wildfowl.

"After analyzing the results of the January inventory, and giving due consideration to all other sources of reliable information, we are forced to conclude that the birds have not only suffered reverses on their breeding grounds but have been seriously depleted by excessive shooting," said Mr. Day.

The annual January inventory is the result of simultaneous observations made throughout the country by the Service's corps of field workers and qualified volunteers. During the 1946 inventory both surface and aerial coverage was exceptionally good and adequate plane facilities were available in almost every area. In addition to its own planes, the Service was aided by those belonging to some of the States, the Coast Guard, the Naval Air Service, and the Army Air Forces.

Inventory figures are not to be considered as accurate counts of waterfowl populations but are estimated totals that serve each year to indicate trends in the numbers of wild ducks and geese, Mr. Day emphasized. "The inventory," he said, "is used by the Service as a yardstick with which to measure success and determine future needs in administering this natural resource."

A breakdown of inventory results shows that with but two exceptions every species of game duck has suffered losses since the inventory of 1945. The exceptions are the black duck or "black mallard", which is about as abundant as in 1945 and the blue-winged teal which shows a slight increase. These bright spots, however, are completely obliterated by losses among such favorites as the green-headed mallard—the "bread and butter" shooting of thousands of sportsmen—the pintail, the green-winged teal, the scaups, the redhead, and the canvasback. Although somewhat below its 1945 population, the wood duck makes a better showing than many of the others for which decreases are recorded, despite the fact that one of this species now may be included in the daily bag.

Among geese, the blue goose, cackling goose, and both species of brant have registered gratifying increases. These increases, unfortunately, are offset largely by losses among Canada and white-fronted geese.

The success of the 1945 breeding season was considerably below normal, Service reports reveal. In addition, shooting was very heavy. Although hunting was rated "indifferent to poor" in many sections of the country, in other areas it was good. With record-breaking numbers of duck hunters afield, the total kill was very high.

At the close of the 1945 hunting season, and before the inventory had been taken, the Service reported that more ducks and geese had been killed during the season than were produced on the breeding grounds. Service officials warned that this alarming situation, brought about by brisk hunting, was a dangerous threat.

The only available index to the number of wildfowl hunters in the country is provided by the sale of duck stamps which are required by law of all migratory waterfowl hunters over 16 years old. For the 9-month period ending March 31, 1946, sales of the 1945-46 issue skyrocketed to a new high of 1,686,368. The total sales of the 1944-45 series amounted to 1,487,029. In 1934, the first year these stamps were required, 635,000 were sold. "While there are other factors contributing to the present decline in waterfowl, this sudden, huge increase in the number of gunners is of major importance," Mr. Day observed.

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