



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SEPTEMBER 28, 1958

THREE DRY YEARS IN NESTING AREAS HURT DIVING DUCKS

America's diving ducks have seldom "had it so bad" as during the past three years, records of the Department of the Interior show. This has led to regulations restricting hunting on two of the divers--the canvasback and redhead--and serious concern over other species.

This condition arises because conditions on their breeding grounds for the past three years have been especially adverse. The plight of these birds is reflected in both the winter survey and the nesting ground survey made by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the United States Fish and Wildlife service.

Diving ducks--so named from their habit of diving as much as 20 or 30 feet for food in contrast with the puddlers or dabblers which "up-end" in search of food in shallow water--usually nest over or in the immediate vicinity of water. Ring-necked ducks usually nest near the edge of water while greater and lesser scaup ducks nest on the ground close to water. The favorite nesting site of the "can" and redhead is a rush or cattail marsh and the nest itself is just inches above the water. Studies show that nesting success of 75 percent is not unusual when conditions are good but that it drops down to less than 50 percent if the marsh dries during the nesting period.

Weather conditions on the prairies in the United States and Canada during the past three years have hit the diving ducks hard, eliminating nesting sites and reducing the hatch of those which did nest. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel consider the idea that those divers which did not nest in their traditional areas might have established a new breeding ground elsewhere in Canada's vastness as only a forlorn hope.

The bulk of the migratory waterfowl shot in the United States are raised on the prairies and parklands of the Dakotas and southern Canada. In 1955 there were over 5,000,000 individual ponds in the southern portions of the prairie provinces of Canada but in July 1958 there were only about 1,700,000. The water index for much of the breeding area is 21 percent below the 1957 record and 66 percent below the 1955 level.

This condition affected all of the species which nest in the prairies and parkland areas but the canvasback and the redhead were hit the hardest because of their over-water nesting characteristic.

The 1958 winter waterfowl survey also indicated a serious decline in canvasbacks and redheads in the Atlantic, Mississippi and Central Flyways but an increase in the number of these birds in their wintering grounds in the Pacific Flyway. In the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways winter count, about one third as many canvasbacks were seen in 1958 as in 1954. In the Central Flyway, the percentage increase in wintering numbers was not so pronounced while the survey on the Pacific Coast showed considerably more birds than in 1954.

Summer and winter data on the redhead both show that this species reached a peak in 1956 but dropped rapidly in 1957 and in 1958.

Restrictions which have been decreed for the fall hunting season limit a winter in the Central, Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways to two canvasbacks or two redheads or one canvasback and one redhead in the daily bag and to an aggregate of four in possession. In the Pacific Flyway, which consists of the States of Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Washington and Utah, there are no special restrictions on the taking of these two species.

x x x



HUNTERS TAKE AN ASTONISHING 47% OF THE CANVASBACK POPULATION EACH FALL.

THIS IS A GREATER PERCENTAGE THAN THE KILL OF ANY OTHER SPECIES.

REDHEADS, OFTEN FLYING WITH "CANS," ALSO ARE VULNERABLE.

THERE ARE FEWER FLOCKS OF CANVASBACKS & REDHEADS IN THE ATLANTIC, MISSISSIPPI, AND CENTRAL FLYWAYS.



LAST SPRING ~ CANVASBACKS AND REDHEADS FOUND MORE OF THEIR POTHOLE NESTING SITES DRY.

PUDDLE DUCKS NEST FAR FROM WATER — BUT "CANS" AND REDHEADS NEST OVER THE WATER; THEY NEED IT FOR PROTECTION AND SURVIVAL



THIS SUMMER— THERE WAS A DROUGHT IN THE NESTING AREA



NESTS WERE LEFT HIGH AND DRY, SO THAT MORE PREDATORS COULD GET THEM

Hines.



HUNTERS :

- ✓ LEARN TO IDENTIFY THE DUCKS.
- ✓ LET THE BIRDS COME CLOSE; THEN YOU'LL KILL CLEAN OR MISS CLEAN.
- ✓ PASS UP CANS AND REDHEADS, SO THEY'LL BREED FUTURE FLOCKS