



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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ANALYSIS SHOWS HEAVY HUNTER EFFECT ON CANVASBACK DUCKS

The annual mortality rate of canvasback ducks during their first year of life is 77 percent; hunting was responsible for at least two-thirds of these deaths.

More than half of the canvasbacks of all ages which died each year died as the result of being shot.

Hunting regulations definitely influence the size of the kill.

The shooting mortality of immatures of both sexes and adult female canvasbacks is relatively higher than that of adult males earlier in the season. The kill of adult males becomes relatively more important late in the season.

There is an indicated higher mortality rate in females than in males both from hunting and from natural causes.

These were the conclusions reached by a research project recently completed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of the Interior reports. They were based upon an analysis of three decades of bird-banding records and upon various biological studies made on canvasbacks in recent years.

Banding records extending over a period of 30 years show the effect of hunting regulations upon the kill. A study of banding records for Louisiana covering the period from 1929 through 1941 shows that by far the greatest percentage of bands recovered came during 1929 when the bag limit was 25 and the season length over 100 days, and that the band recovery rate was correspondingly lower in periods of lower bag limits and shorter seasons. Michigan bandings for seasons of varying length, but of identical bag limits, show that band recovery was substantially lower during the years of shorter seasons.

Bands returned for the 1958-59 season when the shooting of canvasbacks was curtailed in the Central, Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways by a reduced bag limit and also a shorter season in the Atlantic Flyway, show a substantial reduction in

the recovery of bands from birds banded in Maryland, Delaware, Manitoba and Saskatchewan but no reduction in birds banded in New York. The distribution of band recoveries indicated an increased kill in New York. This could be due to the late freeze-up in the Finger (canvasback) Lakes which permitted concentration of hunting on canvasbacks.

The analysis completes a comprehensive study of the canvasback population and band recovery data on file at the Patuxent Research Refuge of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. The first portion of the study was released last year.

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