



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SEPTEMBER 18, 1960

HUNTING RESTRICTIONS OFFER CHANCE TO REESTABLISH REDHEAD AND CANVASBACK DUCK FLOCKS

Hunting regulations were drawn this year to give the canvasback and redhead ducks every possible chance to respond to the improvements expected next year in conditions on the breeding grounds, the Department of the Interior reports.

Last year's hunting of these two species, restricted though it was, took a heavy toll of the adult birds and left a void which only can be filled by birds from this year's broods--provided that hunters make sure the bird in their gun-sight is not a canvasback or redhead.

This year's rains brought back much of the lush vegetation so necessary to the nesting of these and other species. If next year's rainfall is equally abundant in the potholes--and if sufficient "cans" and redheads return to their breeding grounds, a quick recovery of these species can be expected.

The canvasback and the redhead are two of 20 species of the so-called "diving ducks" found in America. They derive their name "diving" from the fact that many of them dive as deep as 30 feet for food. In addition to the diving species, North America has 16 species of puddle or dabbling ducks which feed in shallow water, usually "up-ending", with tail feathers above the water, securing food from the bottom of the pond or lake. America also has three merganser ducks, one ruddy duck and two tree ducks.

There are certain other characteristics which help distinguish a diving duck from a puddle or dabbling duck. The legs of the dabbler are close to the middle of the body, it swims with its tail well out of the water and it springs into the air when taking off on flight. The diving duck has its legs near the rear of the body, it usually swims with its tail close to the water and when taking off for flight it runs and flaps along the surface of the water before getting into the air.

The canvasback is exclusively a North American bird. It is considered by many to be the best table duck of all, although the redhead is a close competitor

and the prairie-fed mallard and the black duck are extremely popular with the epicures. It is presumed that the canvasback gets its flavor from the wild celery buds which comprise a goodly part of its diet but in areas where this is not available the duck retains its table popularity.

The canvasback in migration flies in wedge-shaped flocks at rather high altitude. It flies with speed and directness, with its long slender neck outstretched and with noisy and rapid beatings of its sharp-pointed wings. It is an exceptionally fast flier with speeds variously estimated up to 70-90 miles an hour.

It prefers large bodies of water but is not exclusively a "large water" bird. It usually rests during the day at some distance from the shore but drifts in closer to feed. It has a habit of taking "constitutionals" morning and evening during which a flock will fly up and down the rest area several times, usually well out of gunshot range.

The bird is among the most inquisitive of the ducks and because of this trait it can often be enticed to well within gun range.

It is a strong underwater swimmer. For this reason it is difficult to recover a crippled bird.

The canvasback has a wide breeding range in the northern interior plains of North America but the great majority of these birds breed in the aspen parklands of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and in the mixed grass and tall grass prairies of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and northern North Dakota. Within the breeding range the canvasbacks are restricted largely to various types of deep water, cattail or bulrush marsh.

Recent extensive studies by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife show that the important primary migration route for the canvasback extends from the breeding grounds through the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Detroit River-Lake St. Clair area and then continues across the Appalachian Mountains and terminates at Chesapeake Bay. A noticeable segment of this flight apparently leaves the main route to pass through the Lake Erie-New York Finger Lakes area before swerving down to Chesapeake Bay. Relatively small numbers of canvasbacks continue from Chesapeake Bay along the coast into south Atlantic.

Secondary flights of considerable importance include one that leaves the main trunk line in the vicinity of southern Minnesota and southern Wisconsin and continues down the Mississippi Valley to the Gulf Coast; another extends from the interior of Alaska, the Prairie Provinces and the parklands of British Columbia to the coastal areas of northern California, Oregon and Washington. Another route goes through the Great Plains into Texas and on into Mexico.

More than 60 percent of the canvasbacks winter in eastern United States. The outstanding wintering concentration areas are in the Chesapeake Bay region where more than half of these birds spend the winter months. Most of these are in the upper portions of the bay. Other important concentration areas include

the San Francisco Bay section; southern Michigan; the Mississippi Valley coastal region, and the central plateau of Mexico. Wintering populations in the east have a tendency to shift from time to time, with low counts in one major concentration often offset by high counts in another.

The redhead is similar to the canvasback in many ways. Its nesting preferences are quite similar and its migrations take it to the same general areas but in different concentrations. It is similar to the canvasback also in the fact that both winter and summer surveys show that it has been hurt by the protracted drought in the nesting area.

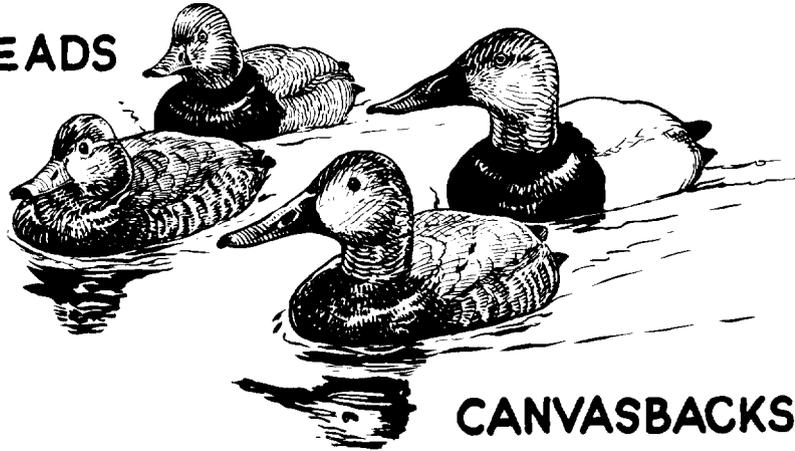
The redhead migrates in a V-shaped formation at great speed. It usually does considerable reconnoitering before landing, often passing and repassing an area several times before it begins to settle slowly onto the water. At times, especially if there are already redheads on the water, late comers will suddenly drop toward the water, each individual bird following its own zig-zag pattern, crossing and recrossing each others path. Like the canvasback, they take their daily "constitutionals" and tend to stay away from shore during the day but drift in close to feed. They, too, are inquisitive and apt to play into the hands of the hunter.

NOTE to Editors: A drawing carrying a special appeal for the protection of canvasback and redhead ducks is attached.

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DON'T SHOOT US!

REDHEADS



CANVASBACKS

**REDHEAD AND CANVASBACK DUCKS
ARE FULLY PROTECTED BY
LAW IN THE 1960-61 SEASON.**



**NESTING CONDITIONS FOR CANVASBACKS AND REDHEADS
APPEAR BRIGHTER NEXT YEAR. BUT THESE DUCKS ARE NOW
IN SHORT SUPPLY. WE MUST GET AS MANY OF THEM AS
POSSIBLE BACK TO THE BREEDING GROUNDS. THAT'S WHY
THERE'S NO OPEN SEASON ON THESE BIRDS THIS YEAR.**

**DON'T PULL THAT TRIGGER TOO QUICKLY.
DEAD BIRDS DO NOT NEST.**

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

LATE HATCH GOOD

Spare Canvasbacks, Hunters Again Told

By CHARLES COVELL

Outdoor Editor

Are you befuddled, duck hunters?

Every year, it seems, announcement of fresh hunting restrictions on one hand and encouraging reports from Ducks Unlimited on the other leave the sportsman wondering.

Today comes a release from Ducks Unlimited of Canada that the waterfowl picture is "definitely improved" after a late hatch that has been generally successful.

At the same time, Fish and Wildlife has issued a fresh appeal to conserve redheads and canvasbacks, the mainstays of Chesapeake Bay shooting. The agency, obviously is looking at the long range picture.

Production Good

In a report on its annual aerial survey of the three prairie provinces which started August 31 and ended September 8, Ducks Unlimited says:

"Manitoba production, generally, has been good and the same is true of the eastern half of Saskatchewan. In Alberta, production has been particularly heavy in the northern parklands and surprisingly good in the south where natural and man-made water were available.

"The Manitoba crew reported heavy populations on most concentration areas and found the overall situation improved considerably over 1959.

"In Alberta, the agricultural fringe south and east of Lesser Slave Lake carries a very high population. Hay Lakes in Northern Alberta is also exceptionally good but in the northeastern part of the province, which includes the Athabasca Delta, populations were down due, we expect, to the very high water levels.

Young Birds Plentiful

"In Saskatchewan, the populations were somewhat improved along the northern fringe of agriculture but further north, with water levels highest in 20 years, there was a reduction from 1959.

"All observers," Ducks Unlimited added, "report that populations seen this year carry a good percentage of young birds."

As for geese, the report said that a biologist just back from the Arctic found that all species of geese met with a very favorable breeding season.

With all this optimism, why the ban on shooting redheads and canvasbacks in the duck season opening November 19 and closing January 7 in Maryland and Virginia?

Giving 'Cans' a Chance

Fish and Wildlife explains it this way:

"Hunting regulations were drawn this year to give the canvasback and redhead ducks every possible chance to respond

to the improvements expected next year in conditions on the breeding grounds.

"Last year's hunting of these species, restricted though it was, took a heavy toll of the adult birds and left a void which only can be filled by birds from this year's broods provided that hunters make sure the bird in their gunsight is not a canvasback or redhead.

"This year's rains brought back much of the lush vegetation so necessary to the nesting of these and other species. If next year's rainfall is equally abundant in the potholes, and if sufficient 'cans' and redheads return to their breeding grounds, a quick recovery of these species can be expected."

Declining for Years

D. H. Janzen, Fish and Wildlife director, outlined the situation in a talk to the International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners in Denver. He said:

"The redhead and canvasback closed season was decided upon only after much study and discussion. These very desirable duck species have been in decline for several years, which was climaxed by the disastrous drought on the breeding grounds last year.

"Water conditions were much improved this spring in much of the canvasback and redhead production territory, but because of last year's drought the usual aquatic vegetation in which these birds like to nest was missing. The new vegetation is very heavy in the better canvasback and redhead breeding territory and should water conditions be good next year there is every reason to believe that nesting habitat for these divers will be ideal.

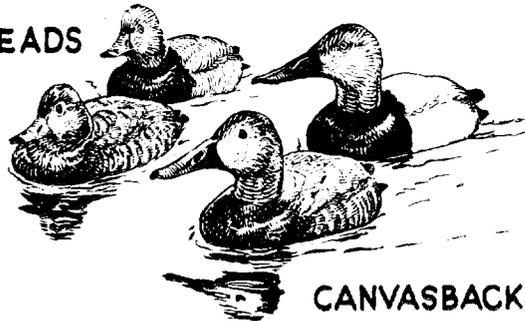
"Our thinking was that every possible canvasback and redhead should be sent northward next spring to take advantage of this potentially excellent situation and thus provide a means for rapid recovery of these species.

"Canvasback are the most heavily shot duck and even with a one "mistake" bird limit last year, I feel that too many were shot. It appears that many hunters went out specifically to hunt these birds even though only one was permitted in the bag.

"I think our final conclusion to close the season was inevitable and I am happy to state that we have received widespread support for this drastic action."

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This poster is being distributed by the Fish and Wildlife Service to help hunters identify and spare canvasback and redhead ducks which have been in short supply. Sportsmen were restricted to one "mistake" bird last year but none may be taken in the seasons opening November 19 in Maryland and Virginia.