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INTERIOR REPORTS INCREASE IN WATERFOWL NESTING POPULATION

A general increase in nesting ducks was reported today by the Department of the Interior following completion of an aerial survey of major waterfowl nesting grounds.

The survey, covering eastern Montana, western Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Canada, and Alaska, was conducted by flyway biologists of Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. It showed that the duck-breeding population had increased almost 37 percent above 1965.

The Bureau said the 1966 gains are significant and encouraging, although the breeding population is still below the long-term (13-year) average.

A survey crew in central Alberta, led by Flyway Biologist Duane Norman, reported a 57 percent increase in ducks over the 1965 breeding population, but nesting ducks in Alberta were still 25 percent below their long-term average. The situation was better in Saskatchewan, where Biologist Ross Hanson reported a 65 percent increase in ducks over 1965. On the long-term average, Saskatchewan's breeding duck population was still down 20 percent. Nesting conditions were excellent in southern Manitoba, but waterfowl there did not show the gains noted farther west. Morton M. Smith reported the same population level as in 1965.

In Montana, Henry A. Hansen reported that nesting ducks increased 25 percent over last year. The Tri-State region (western Minnesota and North and South Dakota) was about 5 percent over 1965, but no better than the long-term average, reported Gerald Pospichal.

In Canada's Northwest Territories, Hortin Jensen reported an increase of about 10 percent, with favorable weather and water conditions. Survey data for northern Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Labrador still are being analyzed, since the survey was delayed by the late season which also adversely affected duck nesting in Alaska. Early reports from Alaska indicate a hatch no greater and perhaps less than in 1965.

The Bureau said the waterfowl nesting conditions now are generally good, but pointed out that a second survey, to check actual production of young, is just beginning. This production survey will provide information for setting the fall waterfowl hunting regulations. The Bureau said it does not know what effect the late season had on early nesting efforts or how water conditions will hold up through the critical brood stage, but that there is reason to expect a better hatch this year.

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