

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release October 20, 1975

McGarvey 202/343-5634

WATERFOWL MIGRATION BEGINS

The annual autumn spectacle of 100 million migrating ducks, geese, and swans has started, Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. Director Lynn A. Greenwalt invites the American public to put aside day-to-day cares and spend time outdoors viewing this marvelous yearly event.

Forty-five species of waterfowl can be seen between now and December at over 360 National Wildlife Refuges which are located in every State but West Virginia. Virtually all the refuges play host to a portion of North America's migrating waterfowl.

National Wildlife Refuge locations can be found under "U.S. Government" in most phone books or by writing to Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240, for a list of all refuges in the United States.

Salt marshes, ponds, and sloughs nationwide will soon be home for the winter to over 90 million ducks of 36 species, about 3 to 4 million geese of 7 species, and upwards of 150,000 swans of two species.

Wild ducks in North America may be divided into four groups: the dabbling ducks, the divers, the sea ducks, and mergansers or fisheaters. Dabbling ducks are characterized by their ability to walk well on land, their "tip-up" feeding habits, and their vertical take-off from land or water. They breed most abundantly in the prairie pothole regions of Canada and in Montana, the Dakotas, and western Minnesota. They include mallards, pintails, teal, northern shoveler, gadwall, and American widgeon.

Redheads, canvasback, scaup, bufflehead, goldeneye, and ring-necked ducks are called "diving ducks." As the name suggests, these ducks normally dive for food. In diving, they obtain both plant and animal food. They feed in potholes, lakes, rivers, streams, ocean bays, and the ocean itself. Divers rarely feed on land. Divers tend to assemble in large flocks, called rafts, on open water of large lakes, shallow bays, and coastal waters, and often shift from place to place in search of submerged aquatic plants and invertebrates.

The sea ducks, including scoters, eiders, and oldsquaw, concentrate on large fresh water lakes, coastal bays, and offshore waters. Many are Arctic nesters and all nest on the ground. Approximately one-third of the common eider population nests along the coast of Maine. Sea ducks feed by diving, primarily for mollusks.

(over)

The mergansers include the hooded, common, and red-breasted. They have long, slender, serrated bills to catch and hold fish which make up the bulk of their diet. They dive for their food, have feet located far back under the body, make a running take-off, and are usually found on waters supporting fish.

Most species of geese, including brant, nest north of the major duck nesting areas, although Canada geese nest locally throughout much of the United States and Canada. Geese and brant often nest in the same areas year after year and some species nest in colonies.

Eleven subspecies of Canada geese breed across Canada and Alaska, and smaller populations breed locally in many sections of the United States. Canada geese winter in the 48 contiguous United States.

Greater and lesser snow geese nest in Arctic and subarctic areas. Some nest as far north as the islands of the Arctic Archipelago. Greater snow geese winter along the Middle Atlantic Coast while lesser snow geese winter along the Louisiana-Texas Gulf Coast and in the Central Valley of California. In recent years increasing numbers of lesser snow geese have wintered in the midwest.

White-fronted geese in North America are found chiefly in the west. They migrate early in the fall. By mid-September birds destined for the Pacific Flyway appear on the Oregon coast.

Atlantic brant nest on the eastern Arctic Coast and adjacent islands. Black brant nest in the Yukon Delta of Alaska, western Arctic Canada, and along the Siberian coast. By early September the flocks move south--across Hudson Bay in the east and along the Arctic Coast to the Bearing Sea in the west. In recent years the black brant flight has bypassed traditional stopover locations along the Pacific Coast, first appearing on wintering areas of Baja California. Most of the Atlantic brant migrate overland from Hudson and James Bays, reaching the Atlantic Coast in the vicinity of New Jersey.

Emperor geese are confined to sparsely inhabited lands bordering the Bearing Sea. They frequent salt and brackish lagoons, foraging over tidal mudflats and beaches for seaweeds and shellfish. The outer Aleutian Islands are their primary wintering grounds.

Whistling swans nest widely over the Arctic. During the course of their migration many swans concentrate on the Great Lakes, and as many as 10,000 to 20,000 of the birds appear in the Bear River marshes of northern Utah. Nearly half of the continent's whistling swans winter along the Atlantic Coast between Chesapeake Bay and Currituck Sound. The remainder winters along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to California.

Trumpeter swans breed primarily along the Gulf of Alaska coast and winter in scattered locations in five Central and Northwestern States.

In addition, an introduced species, the mute swan, is locally established along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to New Jersey and in the northwestern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula.