

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## DUCK BREEDING POPULATION COUNTS HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR

Recently completed surveys in major breeding areas showed a duck breeding population 8 percent larger than that recorded in 1977, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The higher counts are due, at least in part, to the fact that a larger proportion of the breeding population was located in the prairie pothole region this year. Last year many ducks overflowed the prairie pothole breeding areas, which were very dry, and settled in far northern areas where counting is more difficult.

Last fall and winter were generally cold and wet in the prairie pothole breeding area. As a result, the prairie habitat is much improved over 1977 as evidenced by an increase this year in the number of ponds in the North-Central United States and prairie Provinces of Canada. The Dakotas show the most pronounced improvement of any area, both in habitat and numbers of breeding ducks.

The breeding population of mallards, traditionally the most numerous species, is down 7 percent from last year and is 13 percent below the 1955-77 average. Breeding population estimates for other species show the following changes from 1977: gadwall, +31 percent; wigeon, +42 percent; green-winged teal, +53 percent; blue-winged teal, -3 percent; shoveler, +34 percent; pintail, +14 percent; redhead, +21 percent; canvasback, -40 percent; and scaup, -5 percent. The breeding population for these 10 species combined is 8 percent above last year and 3 percent above the long-term average.

Waterfowl nest throughout North America. However, the prairie pothole regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Dakotas, Montana, and Minnesota normally produce 50 to 75 percent of the continent's annual duck crop. This area receives highly variable amounts of precipitation, with periodic droughts fairly common. Consequently, its capability to support breeding ducks also varies markedly. The glaciated landscape, pocked with lakes and potholes, is the key area for waterfowl production in North America.

During July, duck broods are counted to monitor production success from the breeders surveyed in May. A comparison of May and July pond counts is made to determine an index of water stability. These waterfowl production counts and habitat assessments are in progress now. The impact of this year's weather and habitat conditions on actual duck production is not yet known.