



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release August 21, 1984

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1984 WATERFOWL FALL FLIGHT FORECAST

Waterfowl hunters can expect more geese than last year in many parts of the country this fall, according to the 1984 "Waterfowl Fall Flight Forecast" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

However, the total number of ducks in the fall flight will be about 4 percent lower than last year as a result of continued drought and poor habitat conditions in key duck breeding areas of southern Canada. A 4 percent decrease in the total number of ducks is not regarded as a major change, but the figures include considerable reductions in the numbers of two species popular with hunters -- mallards and pintails.

Geese, brant, and swans. Most goose populations experienced good habitat conditions and good production during the 1984 nesting season.

The flights of most populations of Canada geese are expected to be larger than last year, with a few exceptions. The harvest of Mississippi Valley population Canada geese was unexpectedly large last year; as a result, the breeding population this year was smaller than last year and is below the desirable objective established by the Fish and Wildlife Service in cooperation with the involved States. Because the breeding birds experienced good nesting success this year, the fall flight will be similar to last year but will include a larger percentage of immature birds.

Poor production conditions will result in smaller flights for the Hi-Line and Rocky Mountain populations. Fall flights about the same as last year are expected for the Western Prairie and Pacific populations of Canada geese and for lesser Canada geese.

Poorer flights than last year are anticipated for Cackling Canada geese and Pacific brant. The flight of Dusky Canada geese will be larger than last year although the breeding population of these birds remains below the desired level. The fall flight of Pacific white-fronted geese will be about the same as last year.

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Increased fall flights are expected for the Mid-Continent population of white-fronted geese, lesser snow geese, greater snow geese, Ross' geese, and Atlantic brant.

The fall flight of the western population of tundra swans (formerly whistling swans) will be smaller than last year. The fall flight of the eastern population will be equal to or larger than last year.

Ducks. The total number of ducks in the fall flight to the United States is expected to be about 79.8 million compared to 82.7 million last year. This year marked the fourth drought year since 1980 in principal duck nesting areas of southern Canada. Last year an improvement in habitat conditions resulted in a modest increase in the 1983 fall flight, but the improvement did not continue this year. The Dakotas and Minnesota were the only major prairie areas with favorable conditions for ducks in 1984. Improved conditions occurred in some northern areas with increases of ducks noted in Alaska, Northern Alberta, and the Northwest Territories. However, a significant reduction in ducks was observed in southern Saskatchewan and in southern Alberta and southern Manitoba. Compared to last year, breeding populations of mallards were down 16 percent and pintails were down 10 percent. Breeding populations of both species are also considerably below their long-term (1955-83) average. Breeding populations of some other species increased over last year, however, including American wigeon and gadwall. Overall, the 1984 duck breeding population in surveyed areas remained essentially unchanged from 1983 (about 1 percent lower) and was 6 percent below the long-term average.

Duck and goose numbers and the anticipated breeding success are assessed every year by waterfowl biologists from the United States and Canada using a variety of techniques. Information about goose and brant populations is obtained from fall production surveys, counts of birds on wintering grounds and in spring staging areas, localized breeding surveys, and use of satellite imagery to assess breeding habitat conditions. Duck populations are studied through surveys of birds harvested by hunters, analysis of recovered bird bands, and May and July breeding ground surveys conducted by observers in airplanes and on the ground. Various State and Provincial conservation organizations and Ducks Unlimited, Inc., cooperate with the U.S. and Canadian wildlife agencies in the studies.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will publish final framework regulations for the 1984-85 hunting season in early September. States will select final hunting regulations within the frameworks offered by the Service.