



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release September 7, 1984

Megan Durham (202) 343-5634
Inez Connor (617) 965-5100

RESTRICTIONS CURBED LAST YEAR'S BLACK DUCK HARVEST IN ATLANTIC FLYWAY

Legal restrictions and voluntary restraint by hunters significantly reduced the harvest of black ducks in the Atlantic Flyway during 1983, Robert Jantzen, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said today.

Analysis of harvest data indicates the Atlantic Flyway harvest of black ducks during the 1983-84 hunting season was 154,000, about 17 percent below 1982. With the restrictions implemented in 1983, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Atlantic Flyway States are jointly seeking a 3 to 5 year average reduction in harvest of 25 percent as compared to the previous 3 year average. Measured in these terms, last year's take represented a 36 percent reduction from the 1980-82 average of 242,000 birds. The reduced harvest of black ducks in the Atlantic Flyway occurred in spite of a 14 percent increase in the harvest of all ducks in that Flyway in the 1983-84 season.

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State wildlife agencies are pleased by the excellent cooperation hunters have given in the effort to reduce the black duck harvest, and we are encouraged by the significant reduction achieved last year," Director Jantzen said.

(over)

In the Mississippi Flyway, where the black duck bag limit was reduced from 2 to 1 per day in 1983, bag survey data indicate an increase of about 15,000 birds in the 1983-84 season harvest compared to the 1982-83 harvest. The estimated 1983-84 harvest of about 64,000 was close to the average of 65,000 per year for the period 1980-82. Jantzen noted that black duck restrictions were originally scheduled to begin in the Mississippi Flyway this fall but the States voluntarily restricted bag limits last year.

"The number of variables associated with waterfowl harvests makes it difficult to determine the effect of changes in hunting regulations after only one year," Jantzen said. "It is especially difficult in the Mississippi Flyway where black ducks constitute less than 1 percent of the total duck harvest. We need data from more than one year to evaluate the effectiveness of these hunting restrictions."

Last year's black duck harvest also decreased in Canada, although special bag reductions were not required there. In a cooperative effort with the United States, Canada will implement mandatory black duck restrictions this fall. Overall, the total North American harvest decreased from 572,000 in 1982 to 523,000 in 1983.

A gradual decrease of 1 or 2 percent per year has been occurring in the black duck population for at least three decades and perhaps longer. While the exact causes of the decline are not clear, waterfowl biologists believe the harvest restrictions may help stabilize black duck populations until all the causes for the decline can be better determined.

In 1983 the Service and the States asked hunters to assist in efforts to protect black ducks and to focus their hunting efforts on other, more abundant species as much as possible. Hunter information programs were inaugurated to explain the purpose of the restrictions, and how to identify black ducks. Black ducks can easily be mistaken for hen mallards but are a much darker brown, almost black in color, and have a dark belly and tail compared with the mallard's light belly and tail.

Legal restrictions on the black duck harvest include shorter shooting seasons, reduced bag limits, and modified hunting season dates.

The restrictions are expected to remain in effect for the forthcoming waterfowl season.