



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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1987 SPRING DUCK BREEDING POPULATIONS UNCHANGED FROM LAST YEAR

The number of breeding ducks counted in 1987 spring surveys showed no significant change from last year, the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported today.

"The results of this year's surveys generally indicate that duck numbers have not rebounded as quickly as everyone had hoped they would," noted Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle. "We suspect that duck populations just are not as resilient as they used to be, because of the continued loss of the wetlands and nesting cover that ducks need."

While mallards and American wigeon posted modest gains, numbers of blue-winged teal dropped 22 percent and northern pintails continued to decline. Six of the 10 major duck species (mallard, American wigeon, blue-winged teal, northern pintail, canvasback, and scaup) are significantly below their respective average population sizes for 1955-86.

Breeding populations of mallards increased 6 percent over 1986 to 6,691,000, but still are 19 percent below their long-term average. Northern pintails decreased 2 percent to 3,137,000, the second lowest number on record, and are 44 percent below their 32-year average. The decrease in blue-winged teal numbers brought their population to 3,618,000, 26 percent below their long-term average. Redheads dropped 20 percent from last year's population but are still 6 percent above their long-term average. Northern shovelers declined 7 percent but are 12 percent above their long term average.

Species posting increases over last year include green-winged teal (18 percent), American wigeon (12 percent), and gadwall (7 percent). Canvasback numbers increased 8 percent over the last year, although breeding populations in the three eastern flyways remain below desired levels. Scaup numbers did not change from last year.

In 1985, after several years of severe drought in prime duck nesting areas of Canada and the United States, the number of breeding ducks counted was the lowest ever recorded in 31 years of surveys. As a result, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued restrictive duck hunting regulations that reduced the duck harvest in the United States by 27 percent. With improved habitat conditions in the spring of 1986, last year's duck breeding population increased over 1985. Restrictive duck hunting regulations were continued last fall.

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Recently completed harvest survey figures for the 1986-87 hunting season show that the total retrieved duck harvest was 2 percent below 1985-86. Harvests were unchanged in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, while the Central Flyway harvest dropped 2 percent and the Pacific Flyway harvest declined 7 percent from the previous year. The total U.S. retrieved harvest of geese declined 18 percent and the retrieved coot harvest was down 21 percent from last year.

Wetland conditions deteriorated in the Canadian prairies in 1987 as a result of a mild winter and an early, dry spring. May pond numbers decreased significantly from last year, especially in southern Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan. Pond numbers in southern Saskatchewan were the lowest since 1981. Southern Alberta showed little change from last year, but grassland areas continue to be very dry. Habitat conditions in the Dakotas and Montana were generally good, as were conditions in much of Alaska and northern Canada.

The information on duck numbers and habitat conditions comes from surveys conducted by teams of U.S. and Canadian biologists. The North American waterfowl survey is the most extensive wildlife census in the world. Each May, the biologists fly 38,000 miles of transects at low altitudes in small aircraft over major portions of the nesting grounds. In addition, ground crews provide survey information to correct for the birds not seen from the air. The May surveys provide data on both the general conditions of nesting areas and the estimated numbers of ducks and geese in these areas. In July, additional flights are made over some of the same areas to determine the number of duck broods produced. This information is used to forecast changes from year to year in the anticipated fall populations of waterfowl.

Table 2.--Breeding population estimates for 10 species of ducks, 1955-87 (in thousands)*

Year	Mallard	Gadwall	American wigeon	Green-winged teal	Blue-winged teal	Northern shoveler	Northern pintail	Redhead	Canvasback	Scoop
1955	10,345	1,106	3,333	2,076	6,436	1,965	9,251	733	595	7,100
1956	11,711	1,202	3,712	1,898	6,267	2,084	10,124	928	692	6,595
1957	10,946	1,102	3,208	1,293	5,449	1,744	6,856	684	600	6,535
1958	12,904	687	3,372	1,618	5,799	1,515	6,889	524	713	6,040
1959	10,292	683	3,779	3,153	5,300	1,649	7,228	641	481	8,220
1960	8,206	873	3,165	1,630	4,303	1,859	5,769	542	575	5,566
1961	8,290	1,422	3,219	2,216	4,833	1,625	4,860	437	396	6,764
1962	6,144	1,610	2,721	1,119	3,890	1,633	4,299	664	385	6,398
1963	7,360	1,578	2,209	1,754	4,587	1,435	4,361	396	523	6,564
1964	6,974	1,223	2,630	2,051	4,943	1,685	4,111	560	658	6,326
1965	5,948	1,692	2,695	1,526	4,628	1,607	4,301	568	505	5,383
1966	7,401	1,976	2,901	2,219	5,616	2,272	5,777	747	683	5,421
1967	8,205	1,638	2,637	1,944	4,715	2,244	5,870	846	556	5,877
1968	7,586	2,098	2,783	1,805	3,697	1,811	4,225	502	557	5,971
1969	8,065	1,837	3,192	1,991	4,514	2,150	6,390	759	530	6,338
1970	10,379	1,698	3,752	2,259	5,633	2,269	7,004	834	601	6,930
1971	9,843	1,733	3,425	2,352	5,426	2,052	6,291	693	441	6,149
1972	9,867	1,776	3,428	2,407	5,673	2,505	7,875	489	429	9,527
1973	8,781	1,198	3,665	2,444	4,866	1,657	5,114	754	696	7,535
1974	7,392	1,562	3,003	2,221	5,437	2,060	7,165	613	493	7,045
1975	8,109	1,672	2,862	2,038	6,441	1,994	6,387	974	706	7,846
1976	8,637	1,478	2,699	1,844	5,023	1,818	6,045	946	686	6,973
1977	8,226	1,546	2,678	1,952	4,626	1,616	4,971	688	702	7,490
1978	7,695	1,593	3,808	2,978	4,497	2,162	5,664	833	423	7,125
1979	8,444	1,889	3,388	2,920	5,278	2,555	6,070	774	606	9,135
1980	8,003	1,459	3,857	2,925	4,903	2,050	5,420	146	688	7,690
1981	6,757	1,479	3,555	2,515	4,076	2,403	4,227	825	594	7,253
1982	6,684	1,690	3,159	2,247	3,879	2,540	4,112	674	543	6,549
1983	7,107	1,536	2,923	2,574	3,381	2,237	4,086	866	528	8,788
1984	5,974	1,799	3,979	1,804	3,870	2,222	3,664	849	569	8,402
1985	5,475	1,410	2,506	1,873	3,756	1,925	2,935	701	411	6,235
1986	6,303	1,590	2,446	2,588	4,664	2,403	3,201	956	442	6,252
1987	6,691	1,705	2,734	3,041	3,618	2,229	3,137	767	478	6,261
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1955-86 Ave.	8,252	1,495	3,147	2,132	4,888	1,992	5,642	723	563	6,938
Percent Change in 1987 from:										
1986	+ 6	+ 7	+12	+18	-22	- 7	- 2	-20	+ 8	NC
1955-86 Ave.	-19	+14	-13	+43	-26	+12	-44	+ 6	-15	-10

*All duck indexes adjusted for visibility bias.