



BULLETIN

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

1996: DUCK POPULATIONS SOARED, BUFFALO ROAMED FREE, CONDORS FLEW IN THE SOUTHWEST

The continued recovery of the Nation's duck populations after decades of decline is just one wildlife success story in a year that offered many bright spots for species from buffalo to butterflies.

"The American people are making an impressive effort to restore wildlife across the Nation. At year's end, we like to take a moment to reflect on some of the good news that people may have overlooked during the busy year," said Acting U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director John Rogers.

Among this year's good news stories:

- o An estimated 90 million ducks flew south from their northern nesting grounds, the highest figure since the Service began estimating the "fall flight" in the 1950s. Several years of plentiful rain and snowfall in primary nesting areas of the north central United States and south central Canada, along with restoration and conservation of millions of acres of wetland habitat, has boosted duck population by 34 million since 1990.
- o In early December, six California condors were released into the wild in northern Arizona after an absence of 72 years. The six condors, which were bred in captivity in California and Idaho, were held in acclimation pens at the release site for several weeks before they were set free in mid-December. The huge birds nearly became extinct during the 1980s and have been restored through captive-breeding in zoos and releases to their former range in California and, now, Arizona.
- o For the first time since the mid-19th Century, buffalo are again home on the range in Iowa amid the tall prairie grasses of the Walnut Creek National Wildlife Refuge near Des Moines. A total of 14 buffalo were relocated to Iowa from herds at Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma and Ft. Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska. The Service hopes the Walnut Creek herd will reproduce and eventually number 100-150 buffalo.
- o Reintroduction of the gray wolf in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming and in central Idaho has been so successful that no new releases will be made in either area in 1997. The Service released 20 wolves in central Idaho and 17 in

Yellowstone National Park in 1996, and the wolves in the Idaho recovery area produced seven litters this year. Wolf recovery team leaders say that further wolf releases will be considered on a year-by-year basis.

Eighty-two young bald eagles were fledged from 58 active nest sites at the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Minnesota. Nine of the nests produced triplets. By comparison, in 1986, there were nine active nests, each producing only one young.

In August, biologists reported the first recorded breeding of northern fur seals on the Farallon Islands off California since 1817. Biologists observed a bull, several females, and a pup on West End, a wilderness area of the Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, 30 miles west of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. San Miguel Island in the Channel Islands is the only other northern fur seal breeding colony in California.

Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, where most of the remaining wild population of this endangered crane resides, reported a record 13 nesting pairs in 1996, the highest number of nesting pairs recorded in 30 years of monitoring. Today there are 95 Mississippi sandhill cranes in this country, 23 of them hatched in the wild, compared to only 30 in existence in 1975.

About 170 whooping cranes are expected to arrive this year at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, up from 158 last year. Only 16 whooping cranes were left in the wild in the 1940s.

Despite losses last winter caused by red tide along Florida's southwest coast, manatees are doing well at the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge in Florida and populations may top last year's record high of 304 animals. By the end of November, 283 manatees had already congregated in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico with more expected by the end of December. The Service helped return a wandering manatee named Sweet Pea to the wild in Florida after her sojourn and rescue near Houston.

More than 250 endangered Schaus swallowtail butterflies were released into their historic habitat near Miami. The butterfly, which occurs only in Florida, was on the verge of extinction in 1991; populations have been on the rise since mosquito spraying was halted on northern Key Largo during the Schaus breeding season.

Endangered black-footed ferrets have been discovered in the Shirley Basin of Montana, where the species was reintroduced between 1991 and 1994. Surveys at Charles M. Russell refuge near Lewistown, Montana, confirmed the presence of

approximately 20 black-footed ferret kits in 7 to 9 new litters. At least two of the litters were born to last year's wild-born females.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 72 national fish hatcheries.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, stocks recreational fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that funnels Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.

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