

WATERFOWL PRODUCTION FORECAST

ALASKA

1959

by

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Waterfowl production in Alaska will have exceeded by far the optimistic forecast of June 13, 1959 based upon the breeding population survey data. Subsequent ground studies point to an exceptional year from several standpoints.

A team of two biologists has worked without interruption on the Copper Delta since late April. On two square miles of accurately measured habitat they observed 224 Canada goose nests and 115 duck nests of six species. Hatching success was 82.3 per cent for the geese and 67.3 per cent for the ducks with several scaup nests still under incubation. The geese averaged 5.7 eggs per nest. Through the 10th of July 50 broods of ducks had been tallied in this area for an average brood size of 5.9, slightly smaller broods than last year, but maybe too small a sample to be significant. It is interesting to note that canvasback broods were observed, a new nesting record for the Copper Delta, and the high incidence of shoveler broods. In addition, a pair of redhead ducks was observed on both the Copper Delta and Kenai Moose Range. This constitutes a new record for the species in both areas.

The most significant observations, however, were made on the Tetlin-Northway Study area. On May 21, when the aerial survey was flown in this area, all the larger lakes were still frozen solid. Only the rivers, creeks, small potholes and the shoreline of some of the larger ponds had open water. In spite of this very retarded condition a mean density of 5.0 more ducks per square mile was recorded than during the more advanced 1958 season.

It was mid-June before the biological team arrived at the Tetlin camp to start a production study. From the time of their arrival it was very apparent that the breeding population had increased considerably above that recorded from the aerial survey. A few ruddy ducks, several redheads and many blue-winged teal, all new records for the area, were observed. Through July 20, seven blue-winged teal broods had been recorded averaging 8.0 young. No ruddy nor redhead broods had yet been recorded but two female redheads were flushed from dense clumps of tules on July 15 where they may have been nesting. By July 20, over 15 flightless adult blue-wings had been banded, all of which were male birds. Two adult male redheads had also been trapped. In addition to the above new records, two pair of gadwall were observed and a few ring-necked ducks. These were the first gadwalls recorded for the Tetlin area although a few ring-necks have been trapped here in the past.

Of perhaps greater significance than the new records of southern breeders is the influx of shoveler, green-winged teal and canvasback above the numbers formerly breeding in the area. This could mean that displaced prairie nesters have successfully readjusted to a far northern habitat. Through July 20, 330 complete broods of ten species were recorded at Tetlin. The overall brood size was identical with those of 1958, although the early nesting mallards and pintails had smaller broods. This may have been a result of the late break-up. Scaup, bufflehead and goldeneye broods had just started to appear by mid-July and canvasback, a normally early nesting species, was much later than usual. Of

the 24 canvasback broods recorded, 11 were counted on July 15 and 16. All of these were still Class I broods so undoubtedly there are many canvasback still to be hatched judging from the number of adult male moulters. Brood counts for both the Copper Delta and Tetlin-Northway area are summarized in the accompanying table.

Banding prospects for this year are exceptionally good both for diving ducks and dabblers in the Tetlin area. There is a good possibility that this phase of the operation will shed new light on the inter-relationship between displaced prairie birds and the late influx of ducks into east-central Alaska.

In summary, the duck production forecast from Alaska is excellent, certainly the best outlook in the past five years at least.

Black Brant

When the breeding population survey was flown on the Yukon Delta May 31 the brant had not yet arrived on their breeding ground. On July 2 Refuge Supervisor Spencer and Game Management Agent Tremblay again flew a rather comprehensive reconnaissance of the brant breeding grounds. Their July survey indicates a much more optimistic outlook for brant production than the report submitted from the May breeding population survey. A thermo-fax copy of Spencer's brant report is attached.

AVERAGE BROOD SIZE
(All Age Classes Combined)

Species	COPPER DELTA		TETLIN-NORTHWAY	
	1958	1959	1958	1959
Mallard	1 (7.0)	2 (5.0)	37 (8.0)	58 (6.3)
Pintail	1 (4.0)	22 (5.2)	23 (7.1)	60 (6.4)
Widgeon	1 (5.0)		42 (7.3)	41 (7.4)
Shoveler	2 (4.0)	14 (6.4)	5 (7.6)	23 (8.8)
Gr.-W. Teal	1 (6.0)	1 (7.0)	45 (7.2)	82 (7.1)
Bl.-W. Teal				7 (8.0)
Scaup	4 (9.5)	6 (6.5)	50 (7.4)	12 (10.1)
Canvasback		4 (5.8)	22 (7.1)	24 (7.0)
Bufflehead			30 (7.0)	13 (7.0)
Goldeneye	9 (5.4)	1 (8.0)	5 (6.2)	2 (6.0)
Unidentified	5 (7.0)			8 (6.0)
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Total	24 (6.3)	50 (5.9)	276 (7.1)	330 (7.1)