

7/1/39 - 6/30/40

ANNUAL REPORT
of
Crescent Lake Migratory Waterfowl Refuge
and
North Platte Refuge
Nebraska

Fiscal year ending
June 30, 1940

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Department of The Interior
Bureau of Biological Survey
Ira H. Gabrielson, Chief

By

Gene H. Crawford
Refuge Manager

INTRODUCTION

The following annual report covers seven months when Mr. Gilbert E. Wardwell was in charge and the latter five months since I have been made Refuge Manager of the Crescent Lake Migratory Waterfowl Refuge. Therefore, most of my information concerning the first seven months, was obtained from Mr. Wardwell's quarterly reports.



NE-CRL-035

WATER CONDITIONS

The water levels are very low on all of our lakes, due to lack of precipitation. The lakes are lower than they have been for several years. Although the months of April, May and June are generally three of the best months of the year for rain fall, this year during April we received 1.33 inches of precipitation and in May only .64 inch. In June a total of 1.45 inches fell. This is about one third of the normal rain-fall for this period.

We were advised on April 23rd. by our Regional Office that the Land Acquisition Division would not be able to re-set our lake gauges until the fifteenth of July. We immediately took steps to place gauges in order to get the fluctuation on the different lakes. As soon as the engineers come and set gauges on established levels, We can correlate our readings to get the exact drop in lake levels. We have been making weekly readings of our gauges and the past two weeks we have found several of them high and dry above water.

We have continued to take readings of our thirty-three test wells once a week to determine the ground water elevation. Wells number three and six are completely dry and all the others are much lower than last year.

DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

During the first of the fiscal year, the Secondary Headquarters, occupied by the Under Refuge Manager, Mr. Young, was thoroughly reconditioned: A new water system was installed, the dwelling repaired and painted, the yard fenced and lawn sowed. This work was accomplished with the aid of a WPA crew.

Around several of our barren lakes, 37,000 hard-stemmed bulrush root stocks were planted with very good success.

Roads throughout the Refuge were repaired and five new cattle guards were installed in the area.

During the late fall and winter months, thirty-eight new snake traps were constructed, giving us a total of sixty-three traps. This increase of traps has proven a great help: three hundred and sixty three bullsnakes have been caught in traps and fifty five by Refuge personnel or a total of four hundred and eighteen this spring and summer as compared with one hundred and eighty two bullsnakes caught during the same period last year.

Fences over the area have been repaired and new fence built where needed.

DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

continued

With the assistance of WPA labor last fall, five hundred pounds of prairie bulrush seed, three hundred pounds of wild millet and smart weed seed were gathered.

In the latter part of April, 1104 red cedar, 200 caragana, 300 grape and 30 colutea were planted on the Refuge. Two hundred and sixty two pounds of wild millet seed was sown on Gimlet Lake.

The greatest single problem on the Crescent Lake Refuge is the damage done by bullsnakes to duck nests. During the last three seasons, Mr. Ralph H. Imler, biologist, from the Food Habits Research Laboratory at Denver, has been at this Refuge studying duck nests and concentrating on the bullsnake problem, perfecting a very practical snake trap. Due to the scarcity of WPA laborers in Garden County, we were unable to get a project into operation during the spring months. This project would have been of great help to Mr. Imler in his work; however both Mr. Young and myself have worked with him and helped him to the best of our ability. A study of snake migration is being made this season, the results of which will not be complete until later seasons. Bullsnakes trapped on Goose, Blue and Crane lakes are being tattooed by Mr. Imler and released. When these snakes are caught in our traps again it will give us some idea as to their migration. When the results of this study are known we shall understand better how to cope with the bullsnake problem.

WILDLIFE

The Crescent Lake Refuge teems with bird life, from the time migration starts in the spring until the fall freeze. The following birds have been seen and recorded on the Refuge: (Species breeding here are marked with an asterisk.)

Mallard*	Pied-billed Grebe*
Black Duck/_1	Western Grebe*
Gadwall*	Least Bittern*
Baldpate*	American Bittern*
Pintail*	Great Blue Heron
Green-winged Teal*	Black-crowned Night Heron*
Blue-winged Teal*	Double-crested Cormorant
Cinnamon Teal	White-faced Glossy Ibis/_2
Shoveler*	Turkey Vulture
Redhead*	Osprey
Canvasback*	Sand Hill Crane
Lesser Scaup	Virginia Rail/_1
Buffle-head	Sora*
White-winged Scoter/_1	Coot*
Ruddy Duck*	Whistling Swan/_1
Ring-necked Duck	Snow Geese
American Merganser	Canada Geese
Common Loon/_1	Hutchin's Geese/_1
Horned Grebe/_1	Blue Geese
Eared Grebe*	White-fronted Geese/_1

Avocet*

Wilson's Phalarope

Killdeer*

Fipping Plover/_1

Semipalmated Plover/_2

Black-bellied Plover/_4

Long-billed Curlew*

Upland Plover*

Spotted Sandpiper

Solitary Sandpiper

Least Sandpiper

Baird's Sandpiper

Stilt Sandpiper

White-rumped Sandpiper

Semipalmated Sandpiper

Western Sandpiper

Long-billed Dowitcher

Greater Yellowlegs

Lesser Yellowlegs

Western Willet*

Marbled Godwit

Sanderling/_2

Wilson's Snipe

Cooper's Hawk

Broad-winged Hawk/_2

Krider Hawk/_1

Red-tailed Hawk

Swinson's Hawk*

American Rough-legged Hawk/_1

Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk

Prairie Falcon

Duck Hawk

Sparrow Hawk

Marsh Hawk*

Bald Eagle

Golden Eagle

Herring Gull

Ring-billed Gull

Franklin's Gull

Bonaparte's Gull/_1

Forester's Turn*

Black Turn*

Prairie Chicken*

Prairie Sharp-tailed Grouse*

Ring-necked Pheasant*

Western Morning Dove*

Screech Owl

Great Horned Owl*

Burrowing Owl*

Long-eared Owl

Short-eared Owl*

Night Hawk*

Yellow-billed Cuckoo*

Belted Kingfisher

Northern Flicker

Red-shafted Flicker

Red-headed Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Eastern Kingbird*

Arkansas Kingbird*

Phoebe

Least Flycatcher/_1

Wood Peewee/_1

Olive-sided Flycatcher/_1

Horned Lark*

Tree Swallow

Bank Swallow

Rough-winged Swallow

Barn Swallow*

Cliff Swallow

Blue Jay

Magpie

Crow

Chickadee

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

Western House Wren*

Prairie Marsh Wren*

Catbird

Mockingbird/_3

Brown Thrasher

Robin

Olive-backed Thrush

Gray-cheeked Thrush

Mountain Blue Bird

Eastern Blue Bird

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Cedar Wax Wing

White-rumped Shrike*

Northern Shrike

Bell's Vireo

Red-eyed Vireo

Warbling Vireo

Orange-crowned Warbler/_2

Yellow Warbler*

Myrtle Warbler

Audubon's Warbler

Black-poll Warbler

Ovenbird

Western Yellow-throat*

Long-tailed Chat

Redstart

English Sparrow*

Bobolink*

Western Meadow Lark*

Eastern Meadow Lark

Yellow-headed Blackbird*

Red-winged Blackbird*

Brewer's Blackbird/_3

Orchard Oriole

Baltimore's Oriole

Bullock's Oriole*

Cowbird

Western Tanager

Rose-breasted Grosbeak/_2

Rocky-mountain Grosbeak

Luzuli Bunting

Redpoll/_3

Dickcissel*

Pine Siskin

Goldfinch

Towhee

Lark Bunting*

Grass-hopper Sparrow

Western Vasper Sparrow

Western Lark Sparrow

Tree Sparrow

Chipping Sparrow

Clay-colored Sparrow

Harris Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Dakota Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow/_1

Slate-colored Junco/_1

Montana Junco/_1

Pink-sided Junco/_1

McCown's Longspur

Alaskan Longspur/_1

Lapland Longspur/_1

Chestnut-colored Longspur/_1

/_1 Birds observed by W.W. Bennett

/_2 " " " Ralph H. Inler

/_3 " " " Gilbert R. Wardwell

/_4 " " " Gene H. Crawford

Mr. Wardwell has also reported observing an American Egret

MIGRATION

There was a slight drop in number of migrating waterfowl this last spring as compared with the same period a year ago. In the spring of 1939 at the peak of migration there were in the neighborhood of 50,000 waterfowl on the area. This spring we made a very close check at the peak of migration and we counted 21,100 migrating waterfowl on the area. Ruddy Ducks and Shovelers made up eighty per-cent of all species observed. However before this count was made, the early birds, the pintails and mallards, had practically all migrated north. In this first migrating group we estimated 35,000 pintails and 10,000 mallards.

The sand-hill cranes began traveling over the Refuge on the 19th. of March. These birds did not stop. However a flock numbering in the thousands was reported to me to have stopped in fields near the North Platte River at Oshkosh.

From reference files here in the office, I find that the migration of both ducks and geese in the fall of 1939 was greatly in excess of the migration in the fall of 1938.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Due to the isolation of the Crescent Lake Refuge from any well-populated community, it is rarely used as a recreational area, though, it is the writer's opinion that the Refuge is one of the most pleasant locations in this territory. The sand hill roads do not encourage vacationists to visit us. The fishing in Crane and Island lakes has been most unsatisfactory during the season.

When this Refuge was purchased in 1931 for a Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, an agreement was made where-by the original owners were given an exclusive right to graze stock and harvest hay until May 15, 1942. This agreement leaves the Refuge without any revenue from haying or grazing. From a public relations standpoint, at the expiration of the present agreement, the local ranchers who join the Refuge should have the first right to lease the Refuge range land and hay meadows.

Being a new man at the Refuge, I have made it a point to go and get acquainted with our neighboring ranchers, who all have expressed their willingness to help us in anyway possible. I have never met a more friendly, accommodating people than those here in the sand hills. I know our relations with the local people will continue to be more than pleasant.

CONCLUSION

All of our equipment is in good order with the exception of the Chevrolet 1936 Panel Truck. This truck has been driven 34,516 miles by WPA workers and by Refuge personnel over the rough, sandy roads reading the test wells once a week and doing maintenance work. A large percentage of the milage that has been put on this truck was in second gear on account of our bad roads. We shall try to keep the repairs for this truck to a minimum and run this vehicle this year, but it should be turned in next year on a new model.

We have been handicapped this spring for the lack of help, but we are expecting a WPA crew the first of August at the Refuge to assist us in trapping of bullsnakes, road building, fence repairing and other desirable work.

NORTH PLATTE REFUGE

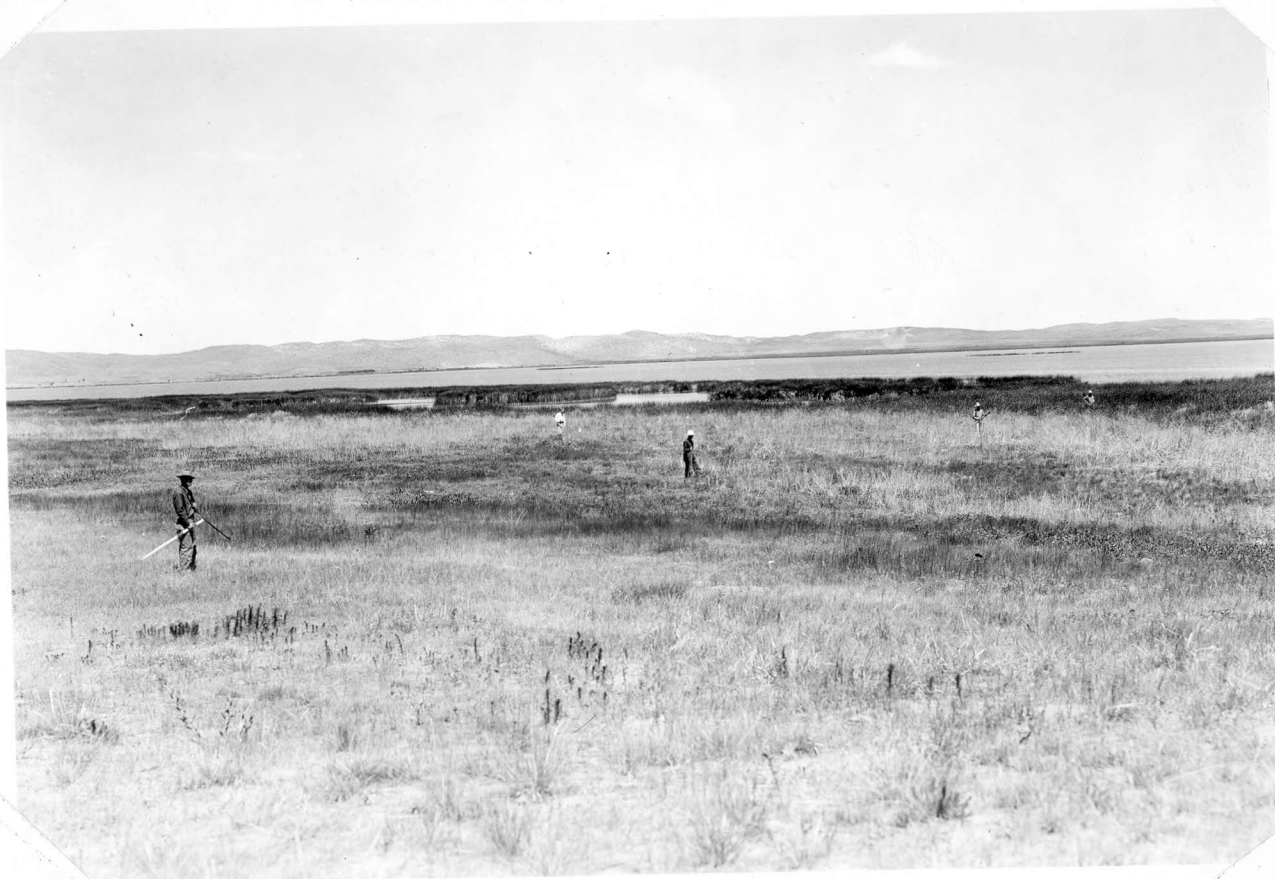
The North Platte Refuge is located near the town of Minatare, Nebraska which is some 110 miles from the Crescent Lake Refuge. This area comes under the supervision of the manager of the Crescent Lake Refuge.

Last fall during migration both Lakes Alice and Minatare were used very extensively as a resting area by migrating waterfowl. Ducks and geese would rest on the area during the day and feed in the nearby corn and grain fields at night. When birds were disturbed by hunters during the season on the North Platte River they could be seen flying to the Refuge by the thousands.

This Refuge is very valuable as a resting area both in the spring and fall; but as this is a reclamation project and the water fluctuates so much, it is used but very little as a nesting area.

This area was visited by Refuge personnel on several occasions this spring and summer and the fences and signs were all in good shape.

On my April trip to the Refuge, approximately 2,000 ducks were counted. These being Green-winged Teal, mallards, shovelers and a few Buffle-heads.



NE-CRL-036

Hunting for duck nests on Hackberry Lake. Nests found by the dragging crew were observed weekly until terminated to determine what predators were active. Bullsnares destroyed about forty per-cent of nests.



NE-CRL-037

Snake trapping has been our major job this spring. The above photo shows a bullsnake being removed from trap on Gimlet Lake near Headquarters.



NE-CRL-038

Above photo shows Lower Gimlet Lake. Several of our smaller lakes are completely dry due to lack of precipitation. The soft stemmed bulrush at the extreme right of picture supported several nests of Redheads and Ruddy's during the seasons of 1938 and 1939. But was dry and unused by nesting ducks in 1940.