

ANNUAL REPORT

OKEFENOKEE WILDLIFE REFUGE

GEORGIA

Wildlife using Okefenokee are some 150 or more species of birds - nesting, wintering and migrating, - and of mammals are bears, deer, wildcats, raccoons, otters, foxes, skunks, opossums, gray and fox squirrels, and a number of different rats, - alligators, several species of tortoises, several species of snakes, lizards, frogs, toads and with many species of insects, they all together form quite a wildlife population.

Of the nesters ~~birds~~, the American Egrets and Little Blue Herons have increased most notably - since Okefenokee became a refuge. The Florida Cranes also have increased somewhat - but of the three nests found by our personnel in March, two were destroyed - one apparently by a bear and nothing to indicate what destroyed the other - both destroyed while containing two eggs. Our four parties counting ducks in January, 1939, counted 76 cranes and in January 1938 only 20, - this would indicate an increase. Now that the nesting season is over, some of these wonderful birds that we have always thought so wild are again appearing along the canal where they stand and watch the small boats go by and apparently with as much interest as they create for the humans who are given the opportunity to observe them - but the most remarkable incident that has occurred - where Florida Cranes were involved was in Floyd's Prairie, away off in the middle of the Swamp - when Sam Mizell, Patrolman-Agent, paddling a small boat and alone, came upon two cranes standing near the boat run and did not move when he stopped within 15 ft. Sam says they looked at him and one lowered his head and picked under his wing a few seconds, then both looked at him as nonchalantly as if he was one

of them - He then spoke to them and they continued unconcerned and undisturbed and that then, in him, developed a queer feeling and he moved on - leaving the cranes still standing there - Sam says they may have been young cranes, but certainly had the appearance of full grown birds.

Our counts of ducks in January indicated a decrease from the year before, but the lower water level may have had some bearing on this - ducks may have found better feeding in other areas and we covered the same areas we covered the previous year or as much of them as we could with the lower water.

Many young Wood Ducks have been observed in different parts of the Refuge and their increase should prove satisfactory. Wilson's Snipe, where we had opportunity to observe, appeared to be at least as numerous as the previous winter but no attempt to estimate was made. One unusual occurrence in Spring was the appearance of several hundred White Ibises on March 6 and on March 31 about 3000 were observed in Chesser Prairie. In 1938 the first White Ibises were noted on May 12. Wood Ibises were first noted this year on April 6, and in 1938 on May 12. Some White Ibises are still to be seen - three or four here or there in the Refuge and many more are now seen about large ponds outside of the Refuge. By far, the most numerous of wintering birds were the Robins, these could be seen by tens of thousands in many different places in Okefenokee. A few were observed as late as April 10th. On one trip from Camp BF-1 to Coffee Bay on the Canal, on April 10th, 40 species of birds were recorded and on any repetition of the same trip quite a few more than 40 species might be noted. On this particular trip, seven of the small birds were Warblers as follows, Pronothary, Parula-Yellow, Myrtle, Yellow throated, Pine and Yellow Palen.

Of the mammals - the bears have certainly increased, although some wandering too far outside the Refuge in search of hogs have found them and they themselves

been found by owners of the hogs and did not return. Cattle enough have stayed within the Refuge lines to keep some of the bears supplied with fresh meat without having to take chances in wandering outside.

Raccoons have increased noticeably - and others, that had almost disappeared, are coming back to such an extent that it is reasonable to expect a goodly population in the near future. Deer are plentiful and are often seen when they wander out of the Swamp on to the high lands surrounding it, but we are not in position to give even a fair estimate of increase in numbers.

In May a North American Panther or Mountain Lion was reported to be seen just outside the Refuge - Said to be seen by the driver of a school bus and by a number of school children occupying the bus and seen in the open road just ahead of the bus. Alligators are to be seen wherever one may travel by boat, and in greater numbers than in the previous year and are very interesting to visitors. There are three alligators now staying near the boat landing at Camp Cornelia and one of these will now come full length out of the water to get a piece of fish held for him on the end of a pole. Tortoises of several species are still plentiful in spite of the fact that the bears try to keep right in behind them when depositing their eggs.

SHAKES Rattlers are found in and about the Swamp as are many other snakes, but in the writer's opinion there are nothing like as many Moccasins in the Swamp today as there were prior to the big fire that swept over the entire area in 1932.

USE MADE OF THE REFUGE On the west side we have no one living within the Refuge, and it will be another year before the field headquarters buildings will be ready for occupancy. On the east side at field headquarters the first dwelling was occupied on May 1st and the guide's cabin occupied on June 1st. These at Camp Cornelia and here Patrolman Gay and Guide Roddenberry have put

up some brackets and keep them supplied with food for birds and more of this will be done, putting up nesting boxes etc. and undoubtedly it will not be long before many small birds will be seen about the headquarters at all times. We have one small colony of Martins and within a few months we will construct homes for many more. Wood Ducks use trees that provide nesting hollows and these are plentiful in all parts of the Refuge. Egrets and Blue Herons usually select for nesting, cypress ponds in the water "prairies" - these ponds are innumerable and they change about from year to year - Often some water turkeys will nest in the same pond with Herons but single nests are found here and there. Night Herons usually prefer a place in a larger body of timber growing in water. Green Herons like the lower growth like on the Canal banks and some nests are found along the Canal banks outside of the Swamp about Camp Cornelia. Owls and Woodpeckers find hollow trees a plenty. No open shooting areas in Okefenokee Refuge and no camping allowed for visitors, but fishing is allowed and during the fiscal year just ended, fishing permits were issued for 5319 man days fishing, and the following fishes were taken:

Perch	50922
Bass	1736
Jack	2300
Mudfish	6256
Catfish	6009
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Besides those fishing, permits were issued to 1128 Refuge visitors among whom were Ornithologists, Entomologists, Botanists and other naturalists.

PREDATOR CONTROL: No activities undertaken on this Refuge toward predator control. Of course the bears prey upon almost anything they can catch and any eggs they can find, probably destroying many alligator nests, eating many tortoise eggs etc., and a Florida Crane's nest is an easy mark for them-

being rather indiscriminate in his tastes - eating not only fruits, berries etc. but probably having part of a cow for one meal and pull the bark from a dead and down tree to find and feast on saw worms for the next, he is probably our greatest predator. Of course we have wildcats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, that do their share of damage to some forms of wildlife - and we have the predators among the birds - the meanest being the predatory hawks. One of our Deputy Game Wardens reports hawks nesting on Soldier Camp Island last Spring and seeing one hawk catch three quail in one day, probably a Blue Darter - however, I believe the balancing of all this is to be left to nature in Okefenokee.

REFUGE IMPROVEMENTS:

Since July 1, 1938, our road from the Refuge boundary on the Fargo side to Jones Island has been completed - 6.89 miles. One Patrolman's cabin and a Guide's cabin completed at Camp Cornelia and these now occupied by Patrolman Gay and Chief Guide Roddenberry. A second Patrolman's log cabin is 90% to 95% completed at Camp Cornelia and a service building also 90% to 95% completed. The Refuge road from the St. George highway to the boat landing at Camp Cornelia treated in places with more clay or more sand as needed to make a better all weather road. Many more tons of debris removed from the Canal - making it so that shear pins are now seldom sheared - but there is yet lots of work to be done on the Canal. A Guide's dock was completed. 9 miles of fence right-of-way on the Refuge boundary lines in the Camp Cornelia area cleared and 7 miles of this graded. 10 acres about the boat landing and Guide's cabin cleaned up - One acre of wet ground filled in at the boat landing and necessary drainage for parking area completed, concrete forms constructed and work begun on latrines at the boat landing.

Drive-way through headquarters area on the north side of road graded and clayed. All the above by CCC. Bureau personnel with some hired labor repaired the board walks at Floyd's Island and Jones Island and put up about 350 penalty and Blue Goose signs in posting the Refuge.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: One party shot a few ducks within the Refuge on December 25th- and on January 11th another man tried it at the same point. We had a patrolman and a deputy game warden watching this area and when they heard the shots, went in to apprehend the violator, but he was in an open marsh and saw them approaching and escaped - leaving his shells, fishing tackle etc. Our men did not get near enough to recognize him. On two occasions some alligators were killed at night in the Billy's Lake area and while we learned enough to feel sure of the identity of the violators we could not secure sufficient evidence to convict. We had one fire near Camp Cornelia and have reason to think it was incendiarism but could not prove it in court. We have many friends living around the refuge from whom we have learned of intents and plans to poach. This and the activities of our personnel have kept refuge violations down to reasonable minimum.

WATER CONDITIONS:

In July 1938 the rainfall was sufficient (with the good rains the previous month) to raise the water level in Okefenokee about a foot over the low mark of the preceeding Spring, however, since last July we have had low water to contend with and trips in small pole boats from the Canal to Grand Prairie and to other points could not be made without getting out and dragging the boat over parts of the route, making it hard work and slow. As June 1939 ended we have again had good rains - that make it practical to travel in a pole boat over some routes that have been very hard work for nearly a year.

These boat routes for small push boats can be improved by some cleaning and clearing so that travel may be accomplished by our patrolmen when the water is low and we hope to get this done.

The writer is now trying to gather some definite data as to the present supply of some food plants, compared to the supply of these same years ago.

John M. Hopkins
Refuge Manager