

RG 22 Narrative Report Eastern Neck NWA 1975

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
EASTERN NECK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Route 2, Box 225
Rock Hall, Maryland 21661

EASTERN NECK
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

NARRATIVE REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 1975

PERMANENT PERSONNEL

Refuge Manager	Roger H. Steiner (Resigned USFWS Eff. 08/31/74)
Refuge Manager	David E. James (E.O.D. 09/15/74)
Refuge Clerk	Marion H. Ireland, Jr.
Biological Technician	Kenneth M. Fletcher, Sr.

SUMMER CY74 PERSONNEL

Biological Aid	Louise Anne Huber (Returned to College 08/30/74)
NYC Office Assistant	Patricia Wilson
NYC Labor/Maintenance Asst.	Norris Hicks

SUMMER CY75 PERSONNEL

Biological Aid	Willie M. Waite
NYC Office Assistant	Darlene Jones
NYC Labor/Maintenance Asst.	James Cann
CETA Laborer	Tyrone Elias

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. GENERAL	
A. Header	1
B. Habitat Conditions	1
II. WILDLIFE	
A. Migratory Birds	2
B. Upland Game Birds	2
C. Big Game Animals	3
D. Fur Animals, Predators, Rodents, and other Mammals	3
E. Hawks, Eagles, Osprey, Owls, and Crows	4
F. Other Birds	4
G. Fish	4
H. Reptiles	4
I. Diseases	4
III. REFUGE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE	
A. Physical Development	5
B. Plantings	5
C. Collections and Receipts	5
D. Control of Vegetation	5
E. Controlled Burning	6
F. Fires	6
IV. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	
A. Grazing	6
B. Haying	6
C. Fur Harvest	6
D. Timber Removal	6
E. Commercial Fishing	6
F. Other Uses	6
V. FIELD INVESTIGATIONS OR APPLIED RESEARCH	
A. Deer Tagging/Censusing-Md. Department of Natural Resources	7
B. Black Duck/Mallard Hybridization Study	7
C. Pathological Study of Woodchuck	7
D. Other	7
VI. PUBLIC RELATIONS	
A. Recreational Uses	8
B. Refuge Visitors	8
C. Refuge Participation	8
D. Hunting	8
E. Violations	8
F. Safety	8
VII. OTHER ITEMS	10

I. GENERAL

A. WEATHER

Precipitation totaled near 35", approximately 5" below normal for the area. Only 2.49" were reported for October and November while temperatures 75 degrees or above were recorded on 11 days during that period. The winter was extremely mild with the lowest temperature recorded at 16 on February 10. The thermometer fell below 20 degrees only 4 times during the year. Adequate rainfalls during the growing season promoted above average yields in farm crops throughout the County. Snowfall totaled 10 1/2".

An intense storm system with some rain and very high winds hit the Bay area on April 3. Southwest winds gusting up to 80 MPH caused extreme high tides and shore erosion. On April 4 the winds shifted to the Northwest forcing water out of the Bay and resulting in the lowest recorded tides in nearly 70 years. The refuge office, the most exposed building on the Island, received considerable damage. All the enclosed porch panels were either damaged or destroyed. One large section was carried over 100 yards into an adjoining field. In addition, shingles were blown off and windows broken.

B. HABITAT CONDITIONS

1. Water

The water levels on the station's fresh and brackish ponds were sufficient for waterfowl use.

A high muskrat population coupled with an unstable soil and recent violent wind storms have combined to decrease marsh areas at an alarming rate.

2. Food and Cover

A fair to good initial stand of barley green browse was devoured by high numbers of Canada geese by December. Frequent spring-like conditions during the winter encouraged repeated resurgence of the barley. At the close of the period enough grain was in evidence to prompt the visit of one farmer with a request to harvest but the request was denied.

Approximately 110 acres of permanent pasture (mainly fescue) remained "green" into December and was browsed heavily by geese throughout the wintering period.

Food and cover production for resident wildlife species was very good but an unusual high population of deer caused over-browsed conditions in the wooded areas and heavy damage to newly planted loblolly pines by snapping the tops (believe they visited each one of the 20,400).

Aquatic vegetation, though showing some recovery, remains poor when compared to pre-Agnes days.

II. WILDLIFE

A. MIGRATORY BIRDS

Total waterfowl use increased a whopping 41%. Canada geese use accounted for most of the gain with a 53% increase in use-days to nearly 2.9 million. This increase was realized in spite of the total absence of corn/soybean remains. Refuge populations are directly related to off-refuge hunting pressure; even to the point where a noticeable reduction occurs when State waterfowl season closes just 8 days for deer hunts. A peak of 70000 was reached here on November 11.

Whistling swan populations were up 27% reversing a huge downward trend that has persisted since 1969. Peaks never reached those in FY74 but use was more consistent. Use totals - just over 69,000.

Black duck and Mallard numbers continue to decline; Blacks at -10%, Mallards -40%. Except for 1075 total use days Coot completely ignored the surrounding shoals of Eastern Neck Island.

Fourteen species of marsh and water bird utilized the refuge a total of 38000 use days - Great Blue Heron accounting for nearly 60% of that total. King rail and Virginia rail account for the bulk of the remaining 40%.

Killdeer are seen year around and peaked this year at 125 birds.

Gull use is usually restricted to the shoal areas. Mourning dove use was high with a peak population estimate of 400.

B. UPLAND GAME BIRDS

Bob-white quail have thrived here for several years. Their numbers are estimated to be 1200-1400. Habitat conditions are excellent with many hedgerows, fallow and permanent pasture

fields providing an abundance of food, cover and nesting sites. One hundred fifty acres of unharvested barley in scattered areas added to these ideal conditions in FY 75.

C. BIG GAME ANIMALS

Virginia White-tailed deer continue in abundance (350-400 pre-hunt) despite the discontinuation of the farming program. Corn noted in deer stomach contents sampled during the deer hunts proved that many freely move to and from the Island.

D. FUR ANIMALS, PREDATORS, RODENTS, AND OTHER MAMMALS

The muskrat trapping program was reinstated following ground census counts of muskrat houses which indicated more than a 2500 rat population plus bank rats (See Section IV. Resource Management - Trapping).

Nutria and Otter are on the Island in small numbers to date.

Raccoons are increasing following a period of reduced populations. An estimated 800 now inhabit the refuge. A conservative estimate of 200 Opossum were reported during the year. The incidence of road kill and trapping take was high. Other predators include Skunk (100 peak) and Red Fox (5).

The endangered Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrels are seen frequently on nearly all areas of the refuge and many do not appear unduly alarmed at being observed. The estimated population of 250 remains stable.

The threat of potential disease in a soaring population of woodchucks compelled us to collect a pair for examination by Dr. F. R. Lucas, Director of the State Animal Health Laboratory in Centreville, Md. Both specimens exhibited hair loss and lesions with some secondary infections due to a heavy infestation of the common rodent mite (Haemolaelaps glasgowi). Dr. Lucas recommended a control program particularly because of the presence here of the Delmarva Fox Squirrel. Mr. Nelson Swink, Maryland State Supervisor (WS) visited the area and agreed with Manager Janes and Dr. Lucas on the need for control. Concurrently Mr. Swink advised that Dr. Thomas F. Albert, Associate Professor in the Department of Veterinary Science at the University of Maryland was very interested in doing a pathological study of the animal (See Section V. Field Investigations or applied Research). A control proposal was approved and work began immediately thereafter. An estimated 10000 were eliminated either by the control method, collection for the pathological study or by road kill. This reduction is less than 1/2 of the total population.

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Cottontail rabbits peaked at 4000. Predators and an increased number of raptors in the area will "take a heavy toll" from that aggregation.

E. HAWKS, EAGLES, OSPREY, OWLS, AND CROWS

Sparrow, Marsh and Red-tailed hawks are the most common raptors on Eastern Neck, other than vultures, and all three have increased in numbers very noticeably this year. Observations of Red-shouldered, Sharp-shinned and Rough-legged hawks are considered happenstance.

Southern Bald eagle visitations, mostly occurring in the winter months, decreased this year. There are no nesting eagles on the Island.

Osprey arrived in mid-March, stayed through October and peaked at 12. Several nesting attempts were made but only one successfully produced young (2) to flight.

Barn owls were more numerous than in years past. One nested in a large red maple in the front yard of the manager's residence and brought off 5 young. Other owls utilizing the refuge include Screech, Great Horned and Barred owls.

F. OTHER BIRDS

Christmas and Spring Bird Counts were made with refuge personnel assisting. A few new sitings were recorded.

G. FISH

There are no fish and crabs on the refuge but the surrounding waters of the River and Bay contain an abundance. Striped bass were not as plentiful as in the past however and many commercial watermen "accused" the rapidly increasing blue fish population for the decline. Crabbing takes continue to improve as the blue crab recovers from the ill effects of Tropical Storm Agnes.

H. REPTILES

Snakes are fairly numerous on the Island but all are non-venomous. Several varieties of turtle are observed in the spring and summer, particularly snappers.

I. DISEASE

No serious outbreaks of disease occurred. The threat of disease in the woodchuck, as noted earlier, was, hopefully, overcome by activation of an approved control program.

III. REFUGE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

A. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

No major development work was accomplished during the period.

Discing and mowing fallow fields throughout the growing seasons to check the growth of Johnsongrass was a never ending chore.

Project for installation of flag pole at the refuge office and equipping the new Chevrolet truck with a roll bar all other similar "small" projects are purposely excluded so as to keep the report concise.

YOC spike camps from Blackwater NWR and Catoctin Mountains arrived here July 29 and their work began the following day. They worked until noon, August 2, then departed that evening. Though working just 3 1/2 days some of the projects the 40 enrollees completed included re-surfacing the .6 mile nature trail, dismantling and disposing of two trapping/banding pens and the rebuilding of a third, filled abandoned well with rip/cap acquired from destruction of an excess block building, replaced decking and some rotted stringers on 150' X 8' dock and many other smaller items.

B. PLANTINGS

Fifty-one plus acres of hardwoods and loblolly pines planted in FY-74 were hard hit by deer, primarily. The survival rate of the pines had been very good and damage did not occur until February. By the end of the period some recovery was noted.

No crops were planted on the refuge for harvest. One hundred fifty acres of former cropland was kept disced through the summer to discourage the growth of Johnsongrass, then fertilized and seeded to barley to provide soil stabilization and green browse. In February these same areas were seeded for permanent pasture using a ratio of 1:1:6:6 lb per acre mix of Alsike and Ladino clover, Kentucky 31 fescue and orchard grass respectively.

C. COLLECTIONS AND RECEIPTS

nothing to report.

D. CONTROL OF VEGETATION

The State of Maryland has a strong Johnsongrass control program and a law against those who refuse to cooperate in any way with the Committee or allow the plant to go to seed. Methods used for checking the growth of the pest plant included discing, mowing, spraying and, in some cases (yes), digging up rhizomes or stripping

off seed heads. Again we used the herbicide MRC (Sodium Metachlorate Chlorate) as a spray with a water carrier and in some instances, dry.

E. CONTROLLED BURNING

A permit was obtained and approximately 180 acres of former cropland burned so as to eliminate an unusual amount of dead grass and allow disking operations to continue.

F. FIRES

None other than planned.

IV. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A. GRAZING

None

B. PAYING

None

C. FUR HARVEST

Following a census which indicated a need to control muskrats the trapping program was reinstated after a one year lay-off. Deviating from past year's lottery systems bids were solicited with the idea that cash outlays make more attentive trappers. Bids totaled \$1236.47 with five trappers reporting gross incomes totaling \$4,067.10; all showing fair profits. A total of 1501 muskrats were reported harvested.

D. TIMBER REMOVAL

None

E. COMMERCIAL FISHING

Eastern Neck provides access only. Commercial fishermen use the County Landing at Bogles' Wharf.

F. OTHER USES

None

V. FIELD INVESTIGATIONS OR APPLIED RESEARCH

A. DEER TAGGING/CENSUSING - MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

A deer tagging/censusing study was carried on here by personnel from Maryland's DNR. Mr. Robert Coe, Manager of the Millington Wildlife Management Area and members of his staff spent portions of several evenings on the Island and tagged eight (8) mature deer. Ear-tagged deer harvested this Fall will carry a \$20.00 reward if State is advised and tag returned. Refuge input to this study was limited mostly to advising. Additional participation will depend on the success of our hunters in bagging "a tagged one".

B. BLACK DUCK/MALLARD HYBRIDIZATION STUDY

Blacks and Mallards trapped and banded here were also bled by Dr. Ray Morgan of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory, Solomons, Maryland, for his study on the incidence of hybridization in the two species. More than 150 samples were collected during the brief period prior to the suspension of banding operations which was brought on by an outbreak of fowl cholera near Back Bay.

C. PATHOLOGICAL STUDY OF WOODCHUCK, (Marmota Menax)

Since a woodchuck control program was deemed necessary and approved as a result of laboratory findings on two collected specimens (see page 3, last paragraph) a cooperative study involving the refuge and the University of Maryland on the general health of the mammal was logical. Dr. Thomas Albert of the Veterinary Science Department at the University was conducting ongoing research on woodchuck and was very interested in examining samples of Eastern Neck's dense, isolated population. Approximately 50 specimens were collected and post mortem examinations carried out at the refuge. Dr. Albert confirmed the presence of mites on 20% and stated the "general state of their health was good". No histological studies have been done to date.

D. OTHER

Refuge cooperation continued with Dr. William Sladen in the Swan Research Project by reporting neck collared whistling swan, populations here and in the immediate area, etc. Also, refuge personnel took members of the research team by boat to mute swan nest sites.

The Hail Point Area with its 20 acre Loblolly/American Holly stand, 129+ acres of Tidal Salt Marsh, 50 nest Great Blue Heron Rookery and Osprey nest sites was added to the list of established Research Natural Areas during the period.

VI. PUBLIC RELATIONS

A. RECREATIONAL USES

Ingleaside Recreation Area was without picnic tables and grills during July, August and September. In January, 1975, the County Commissioners requested the "re-opening" of Ingleaside and agreed to maintain the area. On March 11, the Commissioners signed a Cooperative Agreement and "opening" operations started by the County Parks and Recreation personnel almost immediately thereafter. Picnic tables and grills were returned, rented sanitary facilities brought in, trees and limbs sawed up and removed, etc. Through the end of the period the County had opened the area and assumed their responsibilities in a commendable manner. Despite the 3 month picnic "freeze", total public use for the year was up 54% to near 75,000. Word spreads fast when one can catch a few blue crabs.

The Maryland Retriever Club held their Fall and Spring Trials here again in October and May. This club continued their fine cooperation in adhering to the special conditions of their permit. Only slight refuge staff participation is requested or needed.

The Kent County Schools Outdoor Education Program was held at the refuge lodge with 240 fourth graders attending. Manager Janes presented a lecture to the students at each of the four day sessions.

B. REFUGE VISITORS

On October 17, Manager Janes led Dr. William Sladen of Johns Hopkins University and Prof. Jacobi of the USSR Academy of Sciences of Moscow on a tour of the refuge.

Asst. Regional Supervisor (RF) Ed Moses visited the refuge October 18 and attended the Maryland Hunter Safety Instructor Seminar at Remington Farms October 18-19.

Regional Supervisor (RF) Howard Woon and Manager Janes met on April 22 with the Kent County Commissioners to detail revised policies and procedures on agricultural use at the refuge. Many local citizens and some of our large, land renting, grain growers questioned the soundness of the decision to discontinue the farming program.

C. REFUGE PARTICIPATION

In addition to many "routine" meetings with members of the Kent

County Parks and Recreation, Rock Hall and County 150th-Centennial Committees and Kent Historical Museum refuge personnel presented twelve on-site slide talks/lectures to approximately 600 visitors and spoke before two civic groups off-refuge during the year.

D. HUNTING

A ten-day deer hunt was held with shotgunners hunting October 26, 28, 29 and 30, Muzzleloaders on November 2, 6 & 9 and Archers ending the hunts on December 7, 11 and 14. A total of 201 shotgunners removed 94 deer for a 38.6% success rate while 104 muzzleloaders took 6 and 79 archers (only a 25% show) took 3. The total take of 103 represented the best overall average on a per hunter basis since the hunts were started in 1966.

Weapon groups have hunted in past years on an alternating basis, i.e., the group that opens the season this year would hunt last next year and so forth. Needless to say, when muzzleloaders and archers follow shotgunners they usually get "slim pickings". When shotgunners open the season take is usually higher and by then, the herd needs a larger harvest. Weapon proficiency tests were required of muzzleloaders and archers. Shotgunner qualifications will be more difficult to administer but is planned for next year.

A rash of mute swan collisions with power lines caused disruptions of electrical service. Once service was out for 1 1/2 hours during hunt checkout time. No major problems occurred during the hunts.

In addition to our hunts refuge personnel spent a total of 12 man days assisting in the Great Swamp NWR hunts. One of those days, (Dec. 6), Manager Janes appeared in U. S. District Court in Newark, N. J. with Regional Director Griffith to present testimony for the defendants in the Great Swamp deer hunt case. Neither were called to testify and U. S. District Judge Lacey allowed the hunt to go on.

E. VIOLATIONS

Twenty-three violations resulting in fines of \$415 were recorded during the period. Most of the cases involved deer hunting and were made by members of the Cambridge Law Enforcement Office. Some trespass cases were handled by forwarding warning letters to the violators.

F. SAFETY

No line loss accidents have occurred at this station since permanent personnel were assigned, 9/1/66.

VII. OTHER ITEMS

1. Manager James and Clerk Ireland represented the refuge at Remington Farms during National Hunting and Fishing Day activities. Two 4' X 4' exhibits with visual displays highlighting the refuge were set up and leaflets handed out. Inclement weather resulted in a disappointing crowd to a well planned program.
2. The Chesapeake Del-Mar-Va Council of Boy Scouts held their Camporee here October 4-6. Cool weather held the number to about 50, excluding leaders. The scouts were given a presentation on endangered species and conservation practices by Manager James and they witnessed a field trial dog demonstration put on at the refuge office pond by personnel from Remington Farms.
3. Clerk Ireland attended the Clerical Workshop in Rhode Island, November 19-22.
4. Manager James visited the Regional Office and participated in the Supervisory Training I Course, January 6-10.
5. Post-Season Waterfowl banding totaled 242 Canada geese, 148 Black ducks and 95 Mallards. Quotas were not met in either species. Blackwater NWR supplied the corn for baiting.
6. This report was written and typed by Clerk Ireland,

Respectfully Submitted:

Joseph E. Ware, Jr., Refuge Manager

Approved: