

REPORT OF
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT STUDY

Progress Report No. 3

Division of Wildlife Refuges

Project: Iroquois - 2

Region 5

Code:

Date: November 1, 1970

Title: Establishment of a Nesting Gadwall Population

ABSTRACT

The main goal of the project is to establish a nesting population of gadwalls on the Iroquois N.W. Refuge by capturing ducklings by night-lighting on Montezuma N.W. Refuge and releasing them on Iroquois. There was no evidence that the release of 12 ducklings in 1969 resulted in any nesting in 1970. Due to a combination of circumstances, night-lighting of gadwalls was not attempted at Montezuma until mid-August. Only nine ducklings were captured and transferred. These were 5 females and 4 males - 8 in Class III and 1 in Class II. They were released in excellent condition on Iroquois' Schoolhouse Marsh on the evening of August 14. It was again recommended that catching operations start earlier next summer, possibly by July 15. It was also recommended that we should strive to transfer a minimum of fifty ducklings per year.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) Establish a nesting gadwall population on the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge.
- (2) Determine the best age range of ducklings to be used for establishing a population.
- (3) Determine the advisability of including the hen with the released ducklings.

INTRODUCTION

The project was initiated in the summer of 1969. Due to a combination of circumstances, however, only twelve ducklings were captured at Montezuma and released on Iroquois. Of these, two (a male and a female) were shot on the opening day of the 1969 hunting season on the nearby Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area. This left only ten birds, 6 males and 4 females, available to establish a breeding population.

METHODS

Young gadwalls, incapable of sustained flight, were captured by night-lighting using an air-thrust boat at Montezuma N.W. Refuge. The morning after a successful capture, Montezuma personnel would notify Iroquois that birds were available for transfer. Iroquois would then send a vehicle to pick-up the ducks. As soon as the ducks arrived at Iroquois, they were banded and released. Records were kept of the age class, condition, and sex of the released birds.

During the nesting and brood season at Iroquois, personnel were requested to report all sightings of gadwalls.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There was no evidence of any nesting by gadwalls at Iroquois in 1970. The last gadwall to be observed during the spring season was a lone male on Ringneck Marsh on May 25. There were no broods observed.

Circumstances were such that in 1970 a suitable air-thrust boat and/or personnel were not available for night-lighting until mid-August. On the night of August 13-14, an attempt was made to capture gadwall ducklings. Only ten birds were caught and one of these escaped from the holding pen. The air boat personnel reported that the lack of success was due to the fact that the bulk of the young gadwalls were flying and the bright moonlight made the remaining birds hard to approach. By the time that climatic conditions were favorable for night-lighting, the rest of the gadwall ducklings had reached the flight stage.

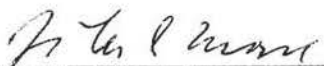
As the weather was hot, it was decided to hold the young gadwalls captured on August 13-14 in the cellar of the subheadquarters building until evening. They were then transported to Iroquois and released on Schoolhouse Marsh. Of the nine birds, eight were Class III and the ninth a II-c male. There were five females and four males. They were released in bright moonlight at about 9:30 P.M. eastern daylight time. They were all in excellent condition, although obviously thirsty. Eight swam off together in a group. The ninth bird, who was late in leaving the crate, spent several minutes drinking and bathing in the headlights of the vehicle before swimming off in the general direction of the other ducklings.

Again it was apparent that the late start of the capture operations was the major handicap in the success of the project. Also it is evident that the numbers of ducklings transferred per year to date have been so small that there is slight chance of success in establishing a nesting gadwall population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We again recommend that catching operations start earlier in the season, possibly by the middle of July. If this is done, we should get a greater distribution in age classes and also catch more ducklings. We should strive to transfer a minimum of fifty ducklings per year.

Submitted by:


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