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ALASKA WATERFOWL PRODUCTION SURVEY - 1968

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I. Methods:

An indication of duck production in Interior Alaska is derived from ground observations on two study areas. This is the eighth year brood counts have been made on four large lakes near Tetlin and the sixth year that brood counts have been made on thirty-four lakes of various sizes near Fort Yukon (see tables). The Fort Yukon data are representative of the average Interior habitat and the Tetlin data represent a smaller more specialized area that is capable of very high production. Observations are made either from a canoe or from the shore and the same method is used each year.

Dr. James Bartonek of the Northern Prairie Waterfowl Research Station at Jamestown, North Dakota participated in the entire project this year.

Comments on goose production on the Yukon Delta are supplied by Cal Lensink and Jerry Hout of the Clarence Rhode National Wildlife Range.

II. Weather and Habitat Conditions:

Spring weather was almost a carbon copy of conditions in 1967. Breakup was early except in the northwestern valleys and there was a minimum of spring flooding. Summer weather has been somewhat hotter than last year. Water levels in the lakes are generally slightly lower than last year creating increased shoreline as bars and islands emerge; increased water temperatures with associated increases in plankton and aquatic growth; and increased density of shoreline cover. It is our impression that the Alaskan habitat is in an optimum condition.

III. Waterfowl Production:

Breeding population indexes for Interior Alaska were up 112% over 1967. Dabblers and canvasback accounted for the bulk of the increase. In spite of the striking increase in breeding population, the numbers of broods observed increased only moderately, 12% at Tetlin and 16% at Fort Yukon (see tables). After good production in 1967 and favorable nesting conditions a moderate increase in production was expected.

The indications are then that Alaska had an influx of birds from other areas that did not necessarily nest with any great degree of success. A few other observations support this thesis. At Tetlin five coots and thirty-five male blue-winged teal were observed. These are the first coots recorded in the area and blue-winged teal are normally seen only rarely. In addition, a redhead brood was encountered, the first since 1960. The occurrence of these species is reminiscent of the 1959 and 1960 seasons when it was felt drought displaced ducks were present. At Fort Yukon the presence of displaced ducks was less obvious but a brood of ringnecks was encountered for the first time on the study plots. At Juneau the large pond at the airport usually hosts three to ten broods of mallards and occasionally a brood of green-winged teal. Five broods of gadwall and two broods of widgeon were found here as well as one brood of green-winged teal and six broods of mallards. No blue-wing, gadwall or widgeon broods had ever been recorded

here before. These were all good sized broods indicating some displaced birds succeed well.

Pintail showed a large increase in breeding population and a slight drop in brood numbers. Vegetation this year was extremely rank and it is felt pintail broods were harder to see than last year so that in fact there is a slight increase in production. Mallard, shoveler, canvasback and particularly widgeon show a very good increase in brood numbers over 1967. Scaup and green-winged teal appear to be much the same as last year. All species combined, we got the highest number of broods ever recorded on each study area.

On the Yukon Delta swan, black brant, cackling geese and white-fronted geese appear to have enjoyed a season very similar to the good season of 1967. Ducks, no doubt, fared equally well.

IV. Conclusion:

With our limited surveys it is difficult to assess exactly what has occurred in Alaska this year. Our habitat is in good shape, our weather has been favorable, our breeding population indexes are up and it appears that we have had good production. There is then every reason to expect an increase in the fall flight of all species, especially widgeon, mallard, shoveler and canvasback.

TABLE #1 - COMPARATIVE BROOD COUNTS FROM TWO STUDY AREAS IN ALASKA

TETLIN										YUKON FLATS							
Species	No. of Broods								% Change from 1967	No. of Broods						% Change from 1967	
	'61	'62	'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68		'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68		
Pintail	19	18	11	4	3	8	21	21	same	30	9	16	19	44	39	-11	
Mallard	34	14	23	2	3	9	13	13	same	8	3	9	6	11	19	+73	
Widgeon	74	18	23	6	7	36	28	39	+28	41	14	39	49	62	88	+42	
Shoveler	2	1	--	--	--	--	1	7	+600	10	3	8	11	13	21	+62	
G.W. Teal	42	30	27	19	16	66	101	103	+2	16	7	18	52	47	44	-6	
L. Scaup*	14	2	11	2	--	10	14	11	-21	9	0	12	49	61	65	+7	
Canvasback	14	18	14	2	3	6	9	16	+78	8	1	13	15	16	18	+13	
Total	199	101	109	35	32	135	187	210	+12	122	37	115	201	254	294	+16	

*Scaup hatch not normally complete at time of surveys

TABLE #2 - COMPARISON OF POPULATION INDEXES AND BROOD SURVEYS IN INTERIOR ALASKA

Species	Interior (Stratum 38) '68 Breed Pop. Index	'68 Tetlin Broods	'68 Ft. Yukon Broods
Pintail	+102%	Same	-11%
Mallard	+94%	Same	+73%
Widgeon	+127%	+28%	+42%
Shoveler	+600%	+600%	+62%
Teal	+53%	+2%	-6%
Scaup	+108%	-21%	+7%
Canvasback	+180%	+78%	+13%
Total	+112%	+12%	+16%