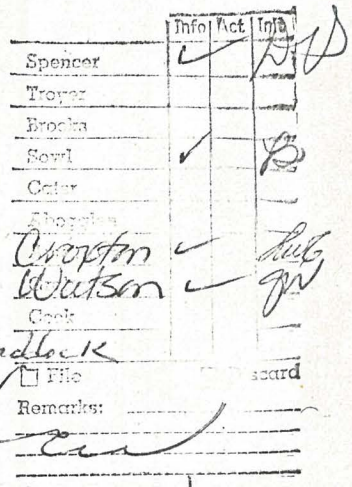
Birds Surveys

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife



ALASKA WATERFOWL PRODUCTION SURVEY - 1970

Return to Area Office!

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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 tenth year brood counts have been made on four large lakes near Tetlin and the eighth year on thirty-four lakes of various sizes near Fort Yukon (see tables). This is the first year that average figures have been calculated for these areas. We tend to put somewhat more faith in the Fort Yukon data as it represents the full range of lake types. The four Tetlin lakes are less typical but offer an interesting correlation with the others. Observations are made either from a canoe or from shore and the same method is used each year.

We are indebted to Cal Lensink of the Clarence Rhode Refuge for comments on Yukon Delta production and to Angus Gavin of Atlantic Richfield Co. for his impressions of conditions on the Arctic Slope.

II. Weather and Habitat Conditions:

After an extremely mild winter all over spring came early to the waterfowl areas of southern and central Alaska and later than normal on the Arctic Slope. Most nesting occurred under favorable weather conditions but in mid June, prior to most hatching, wet weather set in. In a state where mean annual precipitation runs from about four inches (Point Barrow) to 221 inches (Port Walter) "wet weather" means different things to different people. There was, however, unanimous agreement throughout Alaska that this was a wet summer.

Forest fires which were a nuisance in 1969 and may have burned up some nests were non-existent in 1970.

Water levels in the lakes which continued to decline through the fall of 1969 and were not recharged by snow melt, rose slightly through late June and July. Water levels at Tetlin and Fort Yukon were almost identical with the previous year. At Fort Yukon 27% of the lakes on the study area were still dry.

III. Waterfowl Production:

Waterfowl production which had shown a steady increase since the low of 64-65 suffered a marked decline this year. In spite of a good increase in the duck breeding population index (+15%) both study areas showed a remarkably consistent decline. Ducks and geese may have fared better on the Yukon Delta but swans and other birds showed a decline there as well. Reports from the Arctic Slope indicated a sharp production decline from last year for swans and white-fronted geese as well as ducks.

The table from the Interior study areas reflects the nature of the duck decline fairly well.

The total number of broods is down 59% from last year and 28% from the average.

Mallards which were up 153% in the breeding population appear to be down slightly in spite of a disagreement between the two study areas. In spite of a 53% increase in the breeding population of Widgeon the study areas indicate about a 70% decline in broods. The story is much the same with green-winged teal which had an increase of 54% in the breeding population and a decline of about 40% in broods. Pintail with a smaller increase in breeding population (+39%) indicated a slightly smaller decrease in production (-30-40%). The picture is not as clear for shoveler and canvasback but some decline is indicated. Lesser scaup broke the pattern for they showed a 32% decline in breeding population and an 80 to 90 percent decline in broods. A rather drastic decline in lesser scaup is indicated. One can't help wondering if enormous oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico last winter didn't catch a lot of Alaskan lesser scaup. Otherwise adverse weather during the hatching and brooding period is the only known explanation for reduced production.

IV. Conclusion:

One can only conclude that the fall flight of all waterfowl from Alaska will be down somewhat from last year and that scaup will be down considerably.

--Alaska - comparative brood counts from two study areas

	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	Ave. (10 yrs)	1970 % change from '69	1970 % change from ave.
TETLIN													
Mallard	34	14	23	2	3	9	13	13	10	12	13	+20	- 8
Widgeon	74	18	23	6	7	36	28	39	47	11	29	-77	-62
Green-winged teal	42	30	27	19	16	66	101	103	85	44	53	-48	-17
Shoveler	2	1	--	--	--	--	1	7	4	6	2	+50	+200
Pintail	19	18	11	4	3	8	21	21	17	12	13	-29	- 8
Canvasback	14	18	14	2	3	6	9	16	7	12	10	+71	+20
Lesser scaup *	14	2	11	2	--	10	14	11	44	2	11	-95	-82
Subtotal	199	101	109	35	32	135	187	210	214	99	132	-54	-25
FORT YUKON													
Mallard			8	3	9	6	11	19	35	20	14	-43	+43
Widgeon			41	14	39	49	62	88	112	41	56	-63	-27
Green-winged teal			16	7	18	52	47	44	48	28	33	-42	-15
Shoveler			10	3	8	11	13	21	9	6	10	-33	-40
Pintail			30	9	16	19	44	39	26	13	25	-50	-48
Canvasback			8	1	13	15	16	18	18	5	12	-73	-58
Lesser scaup *			9	--	12	49	61	65	87	14	37	-84	-62
Subtotal			122	37	115	201	254	294	335	128	186	-62	-32
Total			231	72	147	336	441	504	549	227	313	-59	-28

* Scaup hatch not normally complete at time of survey.