DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

ALASKA WATERFOWL PRODUCTION SURVEY - 1969.

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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 ninth year brood counts have been made on four large lakes near Tetlin and the seventh year 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 shore and the same method is used each year.

Anders Hohn Joensen of the Vildtbiologisk Station, Ronde, Denmark participated in the entire project this year.

II. Weather and Habitat Conditions:

Spring was early and dry over most of the duck breeding habitat in Alaska this year. In western Alaska (stratum 37) water levels in the lakes were normal but in much of the Interior (stratum 38) pond levels were down. June and July were extremely dry in the Interior and on the Yukon Flats lakes continued to dry up. Forest fires raged through the Interior in the worst fire season since 1957. Preliminary figures indicate that something in excess of three million acres burned this year compared to five million acres in 1957. Fires began about the 20th of May and continued through July although by the end of July wet weather had stopped the spread of fires in most areas. Smoke was extremely thick in June and brought VFR flying to a standstill several times. Nearly one-third of the Yukon Flats burned during this period. Some nests were undoubtedly burned but duck broods were observed on most lakes within the burn area. None of the thirty-four lakes where we conduct brood counts are within the burn; however, water levels were down about one foot in all lakes and nine of the thirty-four lakes or 22% had dried up completely. Lakes not dried up appeared to be in optimum condition for ducks. Water levels in general are still above what they were in 1960. Conversely water levels in the Tetlin area were up slightly, possibly due to thunder shower activity. On the Yukon Delta July was unusually wet following the early, dry spring.

The net result is that weather and habitat conditions are not uniform or typical rendering an assessment of production rather difficult.

III. Waterfowl Production:

Since the low of 1964 there has been a steady increase in numbers of broods observed on the study plots at Tetlin and on the Yukon Flats. The breeding population this year appeared in excellent condition in spite of a marked decrease from the inflated population of 1968. Moderate increases in production of all species was expected. Such increase appears to have occurred in mallard, widgeon and lesser scaup. Green-winged teal and canvasbacks seem to have held their own and pintail and shoveler may be down somewhat.

The brood counts on the Yukon Flats plots were particularly interesting because about 27% of the lakes had dried up. Of the remaining lakes the

medium sized lakes generally produced fewer birds than last year and the large lakes produced much more. In short, there has been a considerable redistribution of the breeding population. Our study areas are not large enough to be sure that we are accurately documenting this redistribution. Even with the reduced water areas within the plots there were more broods than we have ever recorded before.

IV. Conclusion:

It is quite clear this year that our sampling techniques, dependent as they are on the efforts of only one person, are inadequate to show a true picture of what is occurring.

We can safely say, however, that the fall flight of dabbling ducks from Alaska will be down some from last year but that the number of young in the flight will equal or exceed 1968. Diving ducks, especially scaup, are up.

Preliminary reports from the Yukon Delta indicate conditions and production of geese about the same as 1968.

TABLE B-6 - ALASKA - COMPARATIVE BROOD COUNTS FROM TWO STUDY AREAS

	TETLIN										YUKON FLATS							
	No. of Broods									% Change from	No. of Broods							% Change from
Species	'61	'62	'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68	'69	1968	'63	'64	'65	'66	'67	'68	'69	1968
Mallard	34	14	23	2	3	9	13	13	10	-23	8	3	9	6	11	19	35	+84
Widgeon	74	18	23	6	7	36	28	39	47	+21	41	14	39	49	62	88	112	+27
G.W. Teal	42	30	27	19	16	66	101	103	85	-17	16	7	18	52	47	44	48	+9
Shoveler	2	1	--	--	--	--	1	7	4	-43	10	3	8	11	13	21	9	-57
Pintail	19	18	11	4	3	8	21	21	17	-19	30	9	16	19	44	39	26	-33
Canvasback	14	18	14	2	3	6	9	16	7	-66	8	1	13	15	16	18	18	same
L. Scaup*	14	2	11	2	-	10	14	11	44	+300	9	-	12	49	61	65	87	+34
Total	199	101	109	35	32	135	187	210	214	+2	122	37	115	201	254	294	335	+14

*Scaup hatch not normally completed at time of survey. Scaup note * applies to Tetlin and Yukon Flats areas.