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C. S. Williams

Central Flyway Representative

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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SUMMARY REPORT
OF THE 1956 MIDWINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY
IN THE CENTRAL FLYWAY

Compiled by
C. S. Williams
Central Flyway Representative

The 1956 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey in the Central Flyway

This report summarizes the information obtained by the 1956 midwinter waterfowl survey on the size and distribution of waterfowl populations wintering in the Central Flyway States and Eastern Mexico. The information has been compiled solely for the use of administrators and waterfowl research men who are engaged in the management of the waterfowl resource.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the ten States of the Central Flyway Council, and the Forestry and Wildlife Department of Mexico cooperated in conducting the survey which began on January 9, and for the most was completed within several days thereafter. Thus, with the exception of those in Mexico, most areas were surveyed during the last portion of the hunting season in Texas.

All wintering areas known to be important in the Central Flyway States and Eastern Mexico were surveyed. Aircraft were used for areas which were extensive and held the larger concentrations, whereas ground crews covered the more accessible sections. In all, 474 ground and air observers took part in the survey. It is not known how many miles ground crews traveled in making their coverage, but the 44 State and Federal aircraft which were used flew over 300 hours and covered over 30,000 miles of the wintering grounds.

Survey conditions in the Flyway varied considerably. In most sections, however, the weather during the prescribed survey period was satisfactory or above. In no section did weather seriously influence the estimates.

Summary

Study of the table and graphs which summarize the findings of 1956 and compare them with the records of 1955 and the 1949-56 average, brings out the following points of interest to the management of waterfowl in the Central Flyway:

1. The status of the over-all waterfowl population of the Central Flyway increased 39% over 1955 and 34% above the eight-year average.
2. When the major groups of the waterfowl population are considered separately, their 1956 status was found to be:

Total Puddle Ducks	22%	over	1955;	66%	over	average
Total Diving Ducks	94%	"	"	; 43%	"	"
Total Ducks	36%	"	"	; 38%	"	"
Total Geese	33%	"	"	; 6%	"	"
Total Coot	72%	"	"	; 25%	"	"

3. The most reliable index of the status of individual species is derived from a comparison of the 1956 estimates with eight-year averages. Such comparisons show:

<u>Above Average</u>		<u>Below Average</u>	
Mallard	+ 12	Wood Duck	- 53
Gadwall	+ 11	Mottled Duck	-710
Baldpate	+137	Ring-neck	- 74
G. W. Teal	+ 13	Goldeneye	- 18
B. W. Teal	+ 36	Bufflehead	- 2
Shoveller	+ 41	Merganser	- 1
Pintail	+ 54	Blue Goose	- 10
Redhead	+ 61	W. F. Goose	- 26
Canvasback	+ 37		
Scaup	+ 22		
Ruddy	+ 23		
Tree Duck	+ 73		
Coot	+ 25		
Canada Goose	+ 26		
Snow Goose	+ 5		

It is evident that the status of waterfowl wintering in the Central Flyway in general is a healthy one. All of the more numerous kinds of ducks and geese stand at or above average level. The coot, too, which showed a sizable decrease in 1955 from 1954, and was 25% below average in 1955, jumped to the right side of the ledger this year and now is some above average. This same trend was shown by the baldpate, a remarkable increase taking the population from 43% below average in 1955 to 137% above average in 1956. Divers, also, seemed to have had a good year for the most. Redheads, canvasback, scaup, and ruddy, all of which were below average and of some concern in 1955, now stand from 23 to 61 percent above average. Still of concern because of their continued decrease are the ring-neck and mottled ducks. Both species were below par in 1955 and went even lower this winter.

Among geese, the more numerous snow and Canada geese improved their status noticeably. The less numerous blue goose remained about the same. Only the white-fronted goose showed a marked decrease, dropping from above average to below par.

4. The distribution of wintering birds remained about the same between Mexico and the United States, there being 68 percent in the States and 32 percent in Mexico. The distribution in the States, however, varied somewhat from 1955 and the 8-year average. Every State, excepting Oklahoma and Texas, held a smaller percentage of the wintering population. The slack was taken up by Texas, which held 56% in 1956 compared to 45% in 1955.

Drought conditions continued to plague much of the Central Flyway, although moisture and water conditions were generally better than during 1955. Fall rainfall helped make more small water areas available this year, but there still remained a shortage of sloughs and

ponds and stream flow. Such conditions plus early arrival of winter conditions in the northern sector caused many birds to migrate early. Snow and cold weather combined in northern sectors to reduce the availability of foods and resting areas as early as November 15 from the Platte River northward. From the Platte south and west in the flyway drought influenced the distribution noticeably even though water and food conditions were somewhat improved. The birds dispersed with the water available, in some instances making estimates difficult. The improved water and food conditions in Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico attracted and held larger numbers of wintering birds, but it was in Texas and Mexico where the major increases occurred. No abnormal or unusual concentrations were found wintering in the north this year as was the case during 1955.

5. The composition of the over-all waterfowl population wintering in the Flyway was found to be:

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>8-Yr. Average</u>
Puddle Ducks	67.5	59.5	47.9
Diving Ducks	14.0	19.5	18.2
Total Ducks	83.7	81.9	79.3
Coot	8.6	10.7	11.5
Total Geese	7.6	7.3	9.0
Swan	tr	tr	tr

In composition, pintails regained their lead (25%) which they had lost in 1955; whereas mallards, first last year, dropped to second (21%). Redheads maintained their third rank with 12%, and coot their fourth with 11%. For fifth place, baldpate which made a remarkable surge upward this year, replaced scaup, (6.4:6.1%).

Cecil S. Williams
 Central Flyway Representative
 March 12, 1956