

WATERFOWL BREEDING SUCCESS FOR 1978

An early summer breeding survey of major duck breeding areas by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service showed a duck breeding population 8 percent larger than that recorded in 1977.

The higher counts are due, at least in part, to the fact that a larger proportion of the breeding population was located in the prairie pothole region this year. Last year many ducks overflowed the prairie pothole breeding areas, which were very dry, and settled in far northern areas where counting is more difficult.

Last fall and winter were generally cold and wet in the prairies, improving the breeding habitat, as evidenced by an increase this year in the number of ponds in the north-central United States and the prairie provinces of Canada. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Dakotas, Montana and Minnesota normally produce 50 to 75 percent of the continent's annual duck crop.

The breeding population of Mallards, traditionally the most numerous species, is down 7 percent from last year and is 13 percent below the 1955-1977 average. Breeding population estimates for other species show the following changes from 1977: Gadwall, +31 percent; American Wigeon, +42 percent; Green-winged Teal, +53 percent; Blue-winged Teal, -3 percent; Shoveler, +34 percent; Pintail, +14 percent; Redhead, +21 percent; Canvasback, -40 percent; and Scaup, -5 percent. The breeding population for these ten species combined is 8 percent above last year and 3 percent above the long-term average.

The results of a more recent survey on the impact of this year's weather and habitat conditions on actual duck production are not yet available.

T.H.A.

A BRIEF NOTE CONCERNING CANVASBACKS

By Leif J. Robinson, Wellesley

Since 1970 I have kept a fairly regular watch over the autumn waterfowl at Fresh Pond, Cambridge. The Canvasback, in particular, has shown impressive gains during the past nine years. In 1970 a maximum of eight birds was seen; in 1974 there was a peak of 30. Since then much more dramatic increases have been observed: 196 birds in 1976, 117 in 1977, and 212 in 1978.

Either Fresh Pond is becoming more attractive to this species (for no obvious reason) or the Canvasback has sustained impressive population growth during the past several years. Incidentally, a quick check of the records published in Bird Observer since 1972 supports the idea of a general increase, as it does for two closely allied species, the Redhead and the Ring-necked.