

A COMBINED EARLY RECORD OF DUCK SHOOTING ON THE SUISUN MARSHES OF CALIFORNIA

By EMERSON A. STONER

In 1947 the late M. Hall McAllister, veteran duck shooter on the Suisun Marshes, Solano County, California, informed me that the record book of the old Cordelia Club of that area was still extant, although it had been reported destroyed by a fire. The book was kindly loaned to me by him.

The Cordelia Club was organized in 1880; however, no record of shooting was started until the record book was printed in 1882. The club adjoined the Ibis and Teal clubs (see Stoner, Condor, 36, 1934:105, map). Its property consisted of six hundred and forty acres lying between one and two miles west of Teal Station on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Both the Frank Horan Slough and the Cordelia Slough traversed the Cordelia Club whose grounds embraced what was known as the "string of ponds," ranging in area from one to ten acres, the largest being called the Hayward. These ponds ranged in depth from about four to six feet.

The record book covers the twenty-one hunting seasons from September 29, 1883, to February 11, 1904. Membership in the club was consistently limited to 10 at any one time. The total kill of each season ran from 1406 birds (1884-1885) to 4930 (1902-1903), averaging about 3200 birds per season. Seasons opened about the first of October and extended to the middle or end of February.

During the twenty-one year period a total of 64,872 ducks and 2616 geese were recorded as killed. Swans totaled 161.

	Number of birds	Percentages
Sprig	20,107	31.0
Green-winged Teal	12,064	18.6
Canvasback	10,079	15.5
Widgeon	9,689	14.9
Mallard	2,120	3.3
Gadwall	150	.2
Cinnamon Teal	99	.1
Redhead	77	.1
Spoonbill, bluebill, etc.	10,487	16.3

The total geese killed were:

White	2,496
Gray	72
Canada	28
Brant	20

The record indicates that Canvasbacks usually arrived on the marsh in the latter part of October (earliest date, October 11, 1891), becoming common in November, December and January and diminishing in February. The other species of ducks were on the marsh with the beginning of the hunting season. The dates on which the Whistling Swans were taken indicate the wintering season for this species on the Suisun Marshes, ten being taken in November (earliest, November 16), fifty-seven in December, eighty in January and fourteen in February (latest, February 18).

During the early days, the four largest and most important clubs on the Suisun Marshes were the Cordelia, Ibis, Tule-Belle and Teal clubs. The Teal Club, McAllister advised, had a fine book, beginning the first season, 1882-1883, with 4444 ducks and geese. This book was unfortunately burned in the San Francisco fire of April, 1906.

The total kill of 20,844 ducks on the Tule-Belle Club between 1885 and 1901 (Stoner, 1934, *op. cit.*), and 36,126 ducks at the Ibis Club between 1882 and 1907 (Stoner, Condor, 39, 1937:242-248), added to the kill of the Cordelia Shooting Club of 64,872 ducks between 1883 and 1904 presents a record of 121,842 ducks killed on these marshes. A tabulation of the kill of all three clubs gives the following:

	Total ducks	Percentage
Sprig	36,021	29.56
Widgeon	23,762	19.5
Teal	21,925	18.0
Canvasback	18,568	15.24
Mallard	4,915	4.03
Other ducks	16,651	13.67

The thought, of course, occurs that hunters may have "picked" their ducks by awaiting the arrival before their blinds of the more desirable species. In this connection, Moffitt (Condor, 40, 1938:76-84) states that "when there was no bag limit prior to 1901 in California gunners were not so selective of their game as later and tended to shoot almost any duck that flew by." McAllister concurred in this statement.

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