

FIRST GOOSE SEASON AT FENNVILLE STATE GAME AREA
DISTRICT 13

by
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At the close of a thirty-three day barrage this past season, some 10,000 hunters had knocked down and recovered 596 geese at the Fennville State Game Area. Probably the kill figure should be higher since some kills were not reported, but the fact remains that a lot of hunting expeditions went unrewarded to result in a pretty low success ratio.

The recorded total of 10,042 hunters actually is the count of registered hunts -- the number of hunters can only be estimated since many repeated throughout the season. If we assume that 40% repeated, we still wind up with about 6,000 individual hunters getting about 600 geese -- or one out of ten.

There you have it -- a whale of a lot of hunters rubbing elbows pretty closely and still having a good time getting relatively few geese out of a concentration of birds which approached 9,000 at the peak. And surprisingly few squawks arose from these hunters who were unavoidably bound by restrictive regulations.

I'll sketch briefly the background of the set up, give you a digest of the operation of the permit hunting system and summarize the good and bad of the method:

Acquisition and Development

The Fennville Game Area consists of about 2,300 (2,282) level acres in Allegan County acquired early in 1950 primarily to obtain and maintain under state ownership a goose concentration area which has built up over the years. Undoubtedly, its status as a dedicated sanctuary had considerable to do with the intensive use that geese made of this

muck and sand farmland as a feeding area. Even though the private lands surrounding the sanctuary were leased to hunting, the geese developed a daily flight habit into these farm fields from the nearby Kalamazoo River and bayous. Thus we had a set-up by which geese could be provided protected rest and forage and at the same time could provide pass shooting for the public.

Once the area was acquired, a Department and sharecrop farming program was initiated with the objective of providing plenty of corn and green pasture for the geese. A strip of standing corn surrounding the refuge was worked in to provide a hunting strip for the gunners.

Administration of Permit System

With the stage set to provide plenty of geese, provided they migrated south in time and provided the anticipated cannonade didn't scatter them, a permit and registration system was devised to harvest the geese from a series of hunting zones around the outside of the refuge area.

The planning meetings to blueprint the location of zones, number of permits allotted to each, methods of registration, etc., all went very smoothly, of course, and in no time we had a fine plan which would satisfy everyone. The accompanying chart will show the zones as used throughout the season. Hunters were required to check out and submit their game for examination.

The zones should probably be changed to conform to a slight change in the ownership status and for greater convenience, but otherwise proved fairly satisfactory. A total of 240 permits were allotted to those restricted zones. Overflow registrations were assigned to the northeast "managed unit" which, although requiring a permit to enter, was not restricted to any maximum number of hunters.

Weekend hunting produced very heavy hunting pressure in this unit (up to 250) but at least no one had to be turned away. It was found expedient to allow the permits to be turned in for an opportunity to re-register for another zone, if the hunter desired. This was restricted to a noon time change over, however, to avoid undue disturbance of hunters already situated in their zones. Most hunters were glad of the chance to hunt the area, and favorable comments far outweighed the criticism of our regulations.

Biggest gripe of hunters was the eager hunter who blasted away at geese that were sky high and 95% indulged in the practice -- all justified themselves because "the other guy did it first." This problem is a tough one and I believe is insoluble because of human nature. Certainly this over reaching results in a lower kill and a high crippling rate. Perhaps an education campaign on the spot may be able to help. A goose silhouette in life size posted at 60 yards range fooled most of the hunters and perhaps enlightened some. This type of demonstration may be of some help. Most of the hunters who showed up were not purists, and choice of guns ranged from the 10 gauge magnum to a .410 loaded with number 7's. (One man was successful with the latter weapon incidentally.)

Kill figures for the season were tabulated at the checking station where game was sexed, aged, weighed, and recorded. Our geese gained weight as the season progressed, so apparently we fed them well. We are still feeding them, incidentally -- five to six thousand of them.

A simple tabulation of the kill is attached.

CANADA GOOSE WEIGHTS BY AGE AND SEX
Fennville State Game Area

15 - 31, 1950, (lbs. and ozs.):

| <u>MALES:</u> | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| <u>Adult</u> | <u>Juvenile</u> |
| 10 - 6 | 9 - 5 |
| 6 - 14 | 5 - 5 |
| 8 - 7 | 7 - 1 |
| 63 | 69 |

| <u>FEMALES:</u> | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Adult</u> | <u>Juvenile</u> |
| 8 - 12 | 7 - 12 |
| 5 - 9 | 4 - 8 |
| 7 - 3 | 6 - 6 |
| 48 | 49 |

1 - 16, 1950, (lbs. and ozs.):

| <u>MALES:</u> | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| <u>Adult</u> | <u>Juvenile</u> |
| 12 - 11 | 8 - 8 |
| 6 - 3 | 4 - 14 |
| 8 - 10 | 7 - 3 |
| 77 | 72 |

| <u>FEMALES:</u> | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Adult</u> | <u>Juvenile</u> |
| 10 - 5 | 8 - 5 |
| 5 - 8 | 5 - 3 |
| 7 - 7 | 6 - 8 |
| 80 | 80 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <i>Totals</i> | 140 | 141 | 128 | 129 |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Weight by Zones, Fennville State Game Area:

| | | |
|-------|--------------|--------|
| 58 * | Zone 6 | 70 |
| 79 | Zone 7 | 31 |
| 74 ** | Zone 8 | 80 *** |
| 33 | Zone 9 | 41 |
| 19 | Zone 10 | 36 |
| | Managed Unit | 75 |

| | |
|-------|------------|
| TOTAL | <u>596</u> |
|-------|------------|

Includes 1 Richardson Goose

Includes 3 Blue Geese

Includes 1 Blue Goose

Weight loss in dead birds actually tallied by station personnel: 121

Weight Kill 72

1 Ad. : 6 Juv. Age ratio

HUNTING IMPROVEMENT SUGGESTIONS

1. Sanctuary boundary wire. Dark in A.M.
2. How about retrieving zone - enforced as such. Restrict hunting to corn strip. Eliminate refuge crowding. Eliminate blinds on refuge edge or in retrieving zone.
3. Long shooting???
4. Eliminate dogs in goose zones. However, with a mid-morning opening day and practically no goose shooting on opening day, perhaps dogs would facilitate a better pheasant harvest. How to reconcile this with restrictions on retrieving zone. Perhaps such things should be up to our discretion.
5. Make closing hour on pheasants coincide with waterfowl -- at least on goose zones. Get away from late shooting.
6. Better colors on zone posters.
7. Park in parking lots only.
8. Kids accompanying hunters -- also wives?
9. Changing zone tickets at frequent intervals is bad. Suggest 1/2 day at time on goose zones.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPEEDING UP HUNTER REGISTRATION

1. Hunter should have card filled out but his zone left blank. Checker #1 advises as to display of license and duck stamp, indicates zone map, etc.
2. Hunter hands card to Checker #2, who advises what zones are available, picks up permit tag, and hands card and tag to Checker #3.
3. Checker #3 stamps both the files card, hands permit to hunter. Checker #3 should not be bothered with questions.

Possibility of a building in addition to present station, planned to facilitate traffic.

How about a loud speaker system to instruct hunters on registration cards.

Better bulletin board system -- maps, shooting times, etc.

Public education demonstrations, such as goose silhouettes, etc.

MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
GAME DIVISION

FENNVILLE STATE GAME AREA ALLEGAN COUNTY

SCALE
0 1/8 1/4 3/8 1/2 MI

HUNTING MAP

