

Spring Migration of Waterfowl - 1947

The 1947 spring flights of waterfowl through Michigan were delayed approximately 15 days on an average and in some cases considerably longer by the exceptionally cold weather. The prolonged cold weather permitting ice to remain on marshes and lakes, not only delayed the flights, but also directly influenced local movements of waterfowl within the state. These abnormal movements in turn resulted in diverse opinions among sportsmen as to the abundance of waterfowl.

Early migrants were held back until large concentrations built up at some of the ice-free areas and then pushed northward in hurried and extended flights when weather conditions permitted. Consequently many favored marshes and lakes formerly used, especially those in the interior of the state, were practically without ducks while other locations were reported to have increased numbers. Reports from the west side of the state indicate that increased numbers of waterfowl moved northward along ice-free Lake Michigan while the interior marshes remained frozen. These movements along the Great Lakes shores support the opinions of some well-qualified observers that more migrants passed through Michigan this spring than would be detected by the casual observer.

In order to obtain a picture of state-wide conditions the District Game Supervisors contacted carefully selected observers in their respective districts and submitted reports summarizing the opinions obtained. The following is a summary of these reports by regions: south half of the Lower Peninsula, north half of the Lower Peninsula, and Upper Peninsula.

Region 3

Reports from the three major concentration areas in the southern third of the state are discussed separately followed by a general account representing the remainder of Region 3.

Big Beaver Bay: Reports indicate a marked decrease in dabblers and geese as compared to the spring of 1946. Divers were also fewer but to a less marked degree. Redheads were reported by several observers as more abundant than last year. All observers noted a reduction from 1944. The increase in the spectacular whistling swan continues. Ice left parts of the Bay about April 6 but as late as April 13th flow-ice covered the east side and north end comprising approximately one third of the total area.

Aerial census on April 13th showed count estimates as: 16,150 ducks, 1,170 Canada geese, and 1,150 whistling swans. Ice conditions and lack of birds indicated the main flights had not arrived at this date. A second census was made on April 25 obtaining a count estimate of 25,900 ducks, 2,400 Canada geese, and 12 whistling swans. Extreme care was taken to time our census with the peak period of migration but whether we succeeded is not certain. Ground checks indicate our timing was about correct. On the basis of comparative observations it is the writer's personal opinion that a marked reduction, possibly as

much as 30 per cent, was noted in the numbers of ducks using this area as compared to the springs of 1944 and 1945.

Lake Erie: Reports from western Lake Erie and the Detroit River were among the more optimistic received. Most observers agreed on a general increase in divers; particularly canvas-back and scamp. Dabblers were considered as normal or tending toward a slight increase. Few reports of geese were received, a condition normal for this territory. Aerial censuses on April 13 revealed count estimates, of 30,870 ducks and 160 whistling swan. A second count on April 28 indicated the ducks had moved northward as only 16,400 ducks and 4 swans were counted on the Lake and vicinity of Grosse Ile. Because of hazardous flying conditions the Detroit River was not censused on April 28 but observations from high altitudes indicated few birds were present.

Lake St. Clair: An increase in divers, but a decrease of dabblers characterized reports from this area. Canvasback, redheads, and scamp were judged to show increases. Swans were thought to be present in increased numbers and geese about the same.

Censuses by airplanes revealed count estimates of 14,950 ducks, 75 Canada geese, and 16 swans on April 13 and 4,700 ducks and 12 swans on April 28 indicating that the birds had moved north prior to April 28th.

Remainder of south half of Lower Peninsula: Fewer dabblers, more geese (southwest counties), and approximately the same number of divers characterized the 1947 spring flight when compared to 1946. Most observers noted a general decrease since 1944 in all species of ducks. A decrease in geese, although somewhat less pronounced, was also indicated since 1944. Considerable disagreement among observers was evident in this territory.

Aerial census showed approximately 3,000 geese at Leidy Lake and 5,700 on the Kalamazoo River Marshes on April 14th. On the same date 2,000 ducks were observed on the Kalamazoo River Marshes, 2,000 on Black Lake, 5,000 on Muskegon Lake and 2,100 on the Grand River Marshes and Spring Lake.

Region 2 Reports from the north half of the Lower Peninsula were characterized by marked differences of opinion among observers. Ice-covered lakes delayed flights in the interior as much as three weeks and appeared to have radically changed the movements of birds.

As an example Noughton Lake was only partially free of ice on April 24. Old residents report this is the latest ice break-up they can remember. Many fishermen will long remember the spring they found ice covered lakes for the

opening of the trout season. Observers located at ice-free areas reported an increase while the others said there were fewer birds. Some of the largest concentrations of divers in years were reported for Muskegon Lake and other spots along the Lake Michigan shore, giving evidence that flights along the Lake Michigan shore were increased this spring. In consideration of the abnormal movements and the diverse opinions of observers there is little reason to believe any marked changes occurred in the numbers of migrants compared to 1946. In comparison with 1944 flights a slight decrease was believed to have occurred.

Census of a few lakes in the southern part of Region 2 gave the following count estimates: April 14, Muskegon Lake - 5,000 ducks and 20 whistling swan. On April 25 counts of ducks were: Moughton Lake - 10,000; Tawas Bay - 3,800; Tawas Lake - 2,300; Lake St. Helen - 300. The principal species were scump and redheads.

Region 1.

Either the Upper Peninsula was almost completely by-passed this spring as the delayed flights moved northward, or ducks were extremely scarce there.

Judging from reports, so few ducks have been seen that in the opinion of many observers the main flights had not arrived by May 7, the deadline for mailing reports. The one bright spot in the Upper Peninsula was Little Bay De Noc where increased numbers of divers congregated. Several old hunters reported these spring concentrations to be the largest observed in a number of years.

More detailed information regarding individual Game Management Districts is summarized in the attached charts.

- Chart No. 1. Summary of opinions from selected observers regarding the comparative abundance of waterfowl for the spring of 1947.
- Chart No. 2. Summary of waterfowl observations at selected concentration areas for the spring of 1947.
- Chart No. 3. Summary of waterfowl census by airplane. Count estimates of selected sites for spring 1947.

General Summary

The prolonged cold weather permitting ice to remain on lakes and marshes, especially in the interior of the state, forced birds to build up in numbers at a few ice-free areas and avoid other marshes formerly used

as concentration sites. These abnormal movements and changed flights have resulted in a wide difference of opinion among sportsmen as to the present abundance of waterfowl. Regardless of these factors there seems little doubt that slightly fewer waterfowl, especially dabbling ducks, passed through Michigan during the current spring as compared to 1946.

Diving ducks may have remained about the same for the state as a whole with an increase in certain areas. Geese showed an increase on the west side of the state with a slight decrease reported for the east side. Observations of the spring migration were characterized by optimistic reports from one part of the state but countered by somewhat discouraging reports from others.

Although the national waterfowl situation looks rather gloomy the information we have been able to obtain through contacts with 95 observers indicates that only slight decrease in numbers was detected during the spring flights as compared to 1946. It is important to note however, that the same observers are almost unanimous in reporting a marked decrease since the peak years of continental abundance of 1944.

It is the writer's personal opinion that waterfowl were generally less abundant than the reports from the field indicate. This opinion is based chiefly on aerial survey observations covering the most important concentration areas in the state.

H. J. Miller
Game Division

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Summary of Waterfowl Observations
 at Selected Concentration Areas
 Spring - 1947

Dist. No. and name of Game Supervisor	Location Marsh, Bay, Lake Co.	Abundance Compared to last Spring	Abundance Compared to spring of 1944	Approx. Dates of Peak Abundance	Date Majority Left	Date less left	Numbers at Peak Period of Abundance
1. McFenth	L'Ance Bay Maraga Co.	Same	Less	(May 7) Haven't arrived		4/29	Main flights haven't arrived.
Position 2. Vacated							
3. Eldred	Little Bay DeBoe, Delta Co.	More	More	4/25	5/1	4/18	Est. 4,000. Divers 90% Dabblers 10%.
4. DeVaard	Punawong Bay, Chip- pewa Co.	Less	Less	4/24 to 30	5/1	4/21	Est. None Divers 90% Dabblers 90%
5. Failing	Lower Mar- groth, Crawford Co.	Less	Less	4/30	5/1	4/25	Est. 150 Divers 100%
6. Shapton	Grand Tre- vores Bay " Co.	More	Less	4/28 to 27	May 1	4/3	Est. 3,000 camp. Divers - 95% Dabblers - 5%
7. Kellum							
8. Baumgras	Punawong Lake " Co.	More	Less	4/24	5/1	4/1	Est. 15,000 Divers 95% Dabblers 5%
9. Lycock	Waynauque Pt. Saginaw Bay, Saginaw Co.	Less	Less	4/14 to 21	5/1	4/16	Est. 4,500 Divers 90% Dabblers 90%
10. Dayton	Osio Lake Barry Co.	Less	Less	4/20 to 25	4/30	4/10	Est. 200 Divers 25% Dabblers 75%
11. Shick	High Center Lake Jackson Co.	More	Less	4/10 to 20	May 1	4/6	Est. 10,000 to 15,000 Divers 90% Dabblers 10%
12. Mont- gomery	Pts. Moull- lee, Monroe Co.	Divers More Dabblers Less	Divers More Dabblers Less	4/1 to 7	4/10	3/10 1	Est. 4,000 Divers 60% Dabblers 40%
13. Bartels	Wintergreen & Gull Lakes Cal. Co.	Less	Less	4/6 to 13		4/6	Divers 90% Dabblers 90%
14. Warbach	Lake Lan- sing Ingham Co.	Less	Less	4/14- 20	May 1	4/9	Est. 1,000 Divers 80% Dabblers 20%
15. Tubbs	Sebawing Bay, Eaton Co.	Less	Less	4/13 - 19	April 25	April 13	Divers 60% Dabblers 40%
16. Omer							

Waterfowl Census by Airplane
 "Count Estimates"
 Spring 1947

Date and Time of Flight	Area Censused	Ducks*	Canada Geese	Whistling Swans
April 13, 1947 A. M.	Saginaw Bay	16,150	1,170	1,150
April 13, 1947 P. M.	Lake St. Clair & Flats	14,950	75	16
April 13, 1947 P. M.	Detroit River And Western Lake Erie	30,870	----	160
April 14, 1947 A. M.	Leidy Lake St. Joseph Co.	50	3,000	----
April 14, 1947 A. M.	Gull Lake & 2 mile radius Kalamazoo Co.	375	18	22
April 14, 1947 P. M.	Kalamazoo River Marshes Allegan Co.	2,200	5,700	----
April 14, 1947 P. M.	Black Lake Ottawa Co.	2,000	----	----
April 14, 1947 P. M.	Grand River Marshes and Spring Lake Ottawa Co.	2,100	----	1
April 14, 1947 P. M.	Muskegon Lake Muskegon Co.	5,000	----	20
April 25, 1947 A. M.	Dead Stream Flooding Roscommon Co.	100	----	----
April 25, 1947 A. M.	Houghton Lake Roscommon Co.	10,000	----	----
April 25, 1947 A. M.	Molasses River Marshes Gladwin Co.	100	----	----
April 25, 1947 A. M.	Saginaw Bay	25,900	2,400	2
April 25, 1947 P. M.	Tawas Lake Iosco Co.	2,300	----	----
April 25, 1947 P. M.	Tawas Bay Iosco Co.	3,800	----	----
April 25, 1947 P. M.	Lake St. Helen Roscommon Co.	300	----	----

