

THE JANUARY WATERFOWL COUNT

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At the Ithaca meeting of the Federation in 1954 I was authorized to set up a sub-committee of the Research and Publications Committee to organize and supervise an annual waterfowl census. This census was taken from January 15 to 23, 1955 and the results are a part of this report. It has been agreed to continue the census in 1956. As this is the first time a census of this type has been taken in New York State an outline of the procedure in setting up the census will be given. This it is hoped will serve groups attempting other similar enterprises as well as future chairmen of this count by giving them a pattern which they can amend to their own taste.

The first and perhaps the most important step in preparing for the count was the selection of a committee. In order to be able to function rapidly, the group was chosen from one area, in this case Rochester. Members of this sub-committee are Howard Miller, Richard O'Hara, John Brown, Don Nelson, and Dirk Benson. From this point the work done in Rochester as well as the decisions made were the group efforts of this committee.

It was necessary to publicize the coming census and this was done by articles released to the *Kingbird* and the *New York State Conservationist*. Contact was then made with the regional editors of the *Kingbird* to enlist their cooperation in organizing their areas, giving the census local publicity, tabulating local reports and forwarding them to the Rochester committee. Each editor agreed to cooperate or locate a person in his region to serve as local chairman. Whatever success was achieved in this count is due in great part to these people. The Rochester committee then drew up forms for use in the census and set up the procedure for census-taking and verification of records.

After the census follow-up letters to regional editors brought in all the reports on time. The State totals were tabulated and supplementary information such as weather data was compiled. A careful comparison with the New York State Conservation Department's aerial count was then made and regional editors were asked to comment on differences. At this time they were also asked to make suggestions and to criticize the procedure and details of the census. These comments are to be carefully considered in organizing the 1956 census.

Finally the information from the 1955 census was filed for use in the comparison with future counts and data from this file served as material for this report.

The results of the census were very satisfactory. A total of 189,324 waterfowl were counted by 231 birders who spent 550 party hours in the field (see Table 1). The Adirondack-Champlain Region was the only region not covered. The thirty-six species included a single Wood Duck, two King Eiders, two Harlequin Ducks, three Whistling Swans, five European Widgeons, and six Holboell's Grebes. One of the particularly interesting concentrations of ducks was the flock of 11,143 Canvasbacks on the Niagara River. In contrast it is interesting to note the absence of diving ducks in the Susquehanna Region. The small numbers on the rivers in that region evidently arrive there later in the winter.

TABLE I
FEDERATION OF NEW YORK STATE BIRD CLUBS
First Annual Waterfowl Census — January 15 - 23, 1955
REGIONAL TOTALS**

Region	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VIII	IX	X	Totals
Common Loon	1		1			1			202	205
Red-throated Loon									47	47
Red-necked Grebe	2								4	6
Horned Grebe		3	758		3				810	1574
Pied-billed Grebe	1	4	7	2	3			17	133	167
Mute Swan									313	313
Whistling Swan	1								2	3
Canada Goose			13					2	1521	1536
Brant									2739	2739
Mallard	344	27	261	255	164	17	135	126	3001	4330
Black Duck	317	145	2214	88	610	30	1885	1358	22822	29469
Gadwall									43	43
Pintail	3				21				60	84
Green-winged Teal									17	17
European Widgeon									5	5
Baldpate			5	1					1535	1541
Shoveler									31	31
Wood Duck									1	1
Redhead	48	39	3743		45	13			22	3910
Ring-necked Duck		2	27		4			513	243	789
Canvasback	11143	210	922		11	92		26	6145	18549
Scaup Ducks*	3390	1203	5298		2909	1226		42	55626	69694
Golden-eye	3067	1215	457		504	559	54	415	8426	14697
Bufflehead	42	19	41		17	2		9	1576	1706
Old-squaw	48	119	11		26	10			3154	3368
Harlequin Duck		1							1	2
King Eider									2	2
White-winged Scoter	187	9			1				6585	6782
Surf Scoter	1								1594	1595
American Scoter									226	226
Ruddy Duck	1							5	155	161
Hooded Merganser	4	1	7		2			15	116	145
American Merganser	4951	704	285	194	2470	10	217	677	192	9700
Red-breasted Merganser	72	249	19		555	1			3557	4453
Coot	5	30	1081		4			58	637	1815
Unidentified	336	29	330		28	213		43	8640***	9619*
TOTALS	23964	4009	15480	540	7377	2174	2291	3306	130183	189324

* Long Island (X) includes 118 identified as Lesser Scaup.

** No report from Adirondack-Champlain (VII).

*** 6180 unspecified scoters included in these totals.

The Marine Region alone counted 130,183 waterfowl — over 68% of the State total. Upstate only the Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, Harlequin Duck, American Merganser and Coot were more numerous than off Long Island.

The time of the census was chosen to coincide with the New York State Conservation Department's aerial count in order to make comparisons; to hit a relatively static period in duck activity and to cut down on the number of areas to be covered. These last two considerations led to a more accurate count. It is believed the census gave added incentive to observe birds in the field during a difficult period for such outdoor activity.

Through the cooperation of Dirk Benson of the New York State Conservation Department data from the aerial count was obtained by the committee in exchange for data from the Federation count. The aerial count taken January 11-20, totaled 194,089 waterfowl, a difference of only 2.5% from the Federation count. However, the figures were not as close as this implies. Counts by species and regions show no such agreement. (See

Table II). It appears that ground observers were better able to identify them. The plane, on the other hand, was able to pick out many ducks in areas inaccessible to land observers. They observed two large rafts, totaling almost 39,000 birds, which the Federation counters missed.

Comparison of the counts in the Niagara Region is worth special comment as there the land count is probably the most thorough. Note especially how close the Canvasback counts agree. (See Table II). On the other hand there is disagreement in both the scaup-redhead (grouped because of difficulty of identification from the air) and the merganser counts. A similar situation occurred in Oswego Harbour.

In the St. Lawrence region approximately 24,000 birds were not seen by the ground observers due principally to large rafts of ducks behind the islands. On Long Island, according to John Elliott, a large flock of Brant, observed from land both before and after the census, moved off-shore during the census period and were not seen.

TABLE II
A COMPARISON

NYS Conservation Department Aerial Count Above,**
and Federation Count below.

Group - Region -----	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VIII	IX	X	Totals
Black Duck -----	510 317	4 145	2807 2214	* 88	337 610	996 30	636 1885	264 1358	26230 22822	31838 29469
Mallard -----	140 344	1 27	1323 261	* 255	70 164	15 17	105 135	35 126	1985 3001	3674 4330
Other Dabblers -----	3 3	- -	50 5	* 1	21 -	- -	20 -	- -	1654 1692	1724 1752
Scaup - Redhead -----	11325 3438	400 1242	7536 9041	* -	1112 2954	10200 1239	- -	110 42	41729 55648	72412 73604
Golden-eye -----	3470 3067	249 1215	1950 457	* -	3657 504	12293 559	- 54	156 415	5997 8426	28129 14697
Canvasback -----	11445 11143	35 210	2228 922	* -	852 11	85 92	- -	290 26	845 6145	15780 18549
Scoters -----	188	9	-	* -	1 -	- -	- -	- -	7820 14585	7820 14783
Other Divers -----	91	15 141	5 79	* -	43 47	- 12	- -	14 -	688 5131	751 6028
Mergansers -----	1480 5027	66 954	428 311	* 194	1921 3027	2657 11	- 217	200 692	1886 3865	8829 14298
Coot -----	-	5 30	525 1081	* -	4 -	- -	- -	58 -	500 637	1025 1815
Geese -----	-	-	19 13	* -	17 -	1 -	- -	- 2	22130 6604	22150 6636
TOTALS -----	28360 23964	770 4009	16871 15481	* 540	7949 7377	26247 2174	803 2291	1055 3306	111464 130183	194089 189324

** Region VII (Adirondack-Champlain) aerial count yielded 560 ducks (54 black, 357 golden-eye, and 149 mergansers). These are included in overall totals.

* Region IV (Susquehanna) is not covered by the aerial count.

A careful combining of aerial and ground counts showed the total population of waterfowl in New York at the time of the census to be about 230,000.

It is significant to note that weather before and during this census was normal in temperature and amount of precipitation.

Rochester, New York.