

THE NEW YORK STATE WATERFOWL COUNT — A QUARTER CENTURY REPORT

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Since 1955, the Federation has conducted a January ground survey of waterfowl. This count shares the many shortcomings of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. It is "unscientific," loosely controlled, and largely an amateur effort. Quality of observers is maintained only by the regional organizers' knowledge of their people. Quantity is limited by weather and interest. Observers can count anywhere they please.

The limitations are also strengths. Observers are skilled and dedicated, and their subjects lend themselves well to a limited effort. Significant numbers of waterfowl are found only in the same well-known, predictable places, year after year.

The count was originally intended to supplement the official aerial count of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The DEC made little or no use of the Federation information, but the count kept going, surviving a five-year break from 1968 through 1972. In the spring of 1980, the Federation's Executive Committee was asked if the count should be abolished, but opinion was unanimous for keeping it. Paul DeBenedictis expressed his professional view, saying, "I would be reluctant to abandon any effort that had produced 25 years of data."

Table I shows total statewide numbers only, with no separate tabulation by region. There are few surprises. Most of the waterfowl species show the expected normal fluctuations in population, which can be misleading in annual comparison but show no particular long-term trends. For those species whose status is changing, the numbers tend to support the general impressions of experienced field observers and the comments of Seasonal Highlights and Regional Editors in *The Kingbird*.

The decline of the Horned Grebe (Fig. 1), however, may well be classified as a surprise. Its reduction has been gradual and not easily detected from year to year. If this species does not continue its recent small recovery, it may be time for concern.

The Canvasback's (Fig. 2) decline has been arrested and it is showing signs of recovery.

The increase of the Mallard (Fig. 3), and fears of its genetic swamping of the declining Black Duck (Fig. 4) have been well documented,

TABLE I

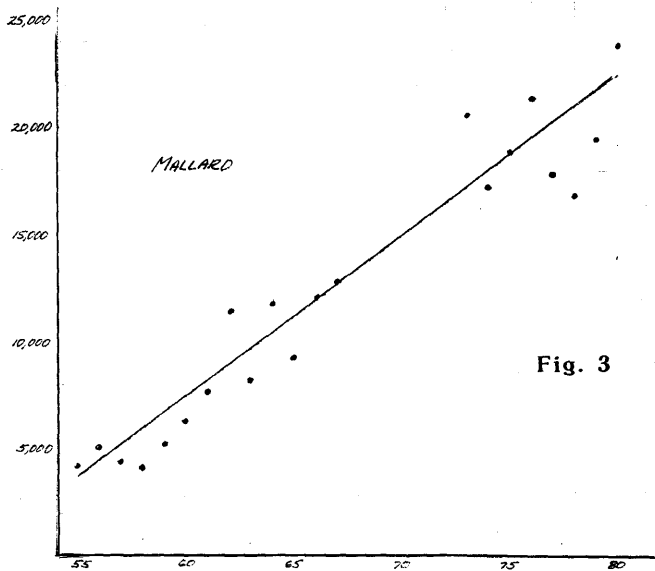
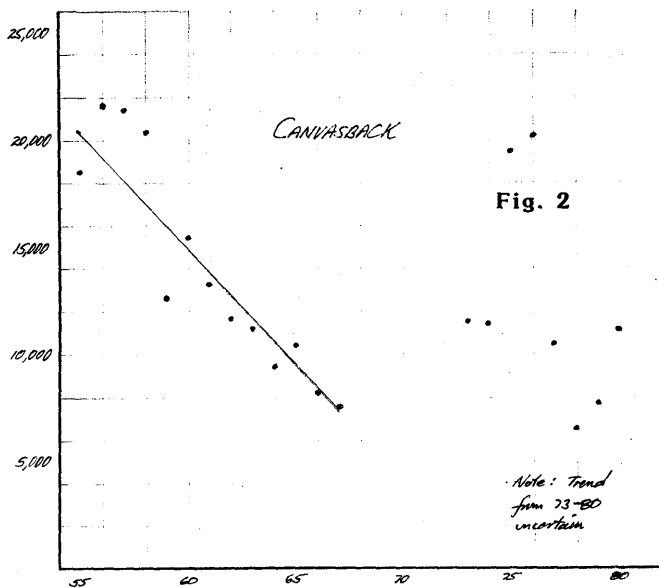
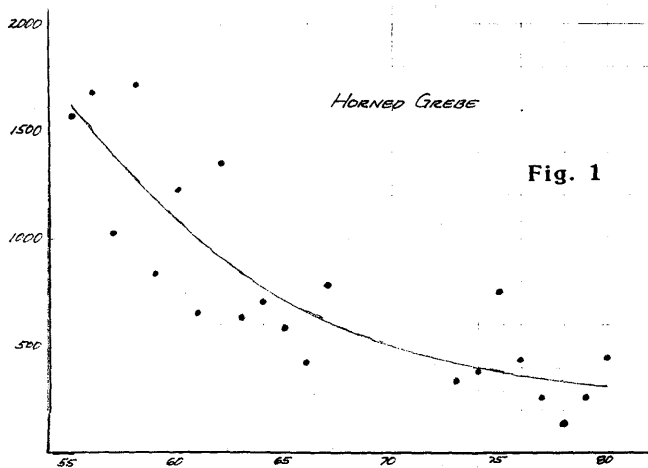
	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962
Common Loon	205	98	70	185	54	148	64	96
Red-throated Loon	47	34	40	58	9	21	22	17
Red-necked Grebe	6	3	3	26	1	3		1
Horned Grebe	1,574	1,692	1,019	1,704	845	1,279	658	1,361
Western Grebe								1
Pied-billed Grebe	167	102	122	95	37	21	23	22
Great Cormorant								
Double-crested Cormorant								
Mute Swan	313	410	759	312	571	495	209	659
Whistling Swan	3	1		3		10		
Canada Goose	1,536	1,594	1,955	1,998	1,467	1,337	1,334	3,069
Brant	2,739	4,233	8,610	2,423	2,962	23,114	34,546	12,058
White-fronted Goose							1	
Snow Goose		1	4	1	2	8	1	1
Mallard	4,330	5,124	4,653	4,126	5,392	6,498	5,825	11,627
Black Duck	29,469	20,211	22,565	16,984	19,575	24,870	22,356	27,993
Mallard x Black						13	1	2
Gadwall	43	140	143	91	117	91	55	125
Pintail	84	151	118	83	162	204	39	350
Green-winged Teal	17	71	101	123	86	84	27	142
Blue-winged Teal		1				1	1	1
Cinnamon Teal			1					
European Wigeon	5	2	2	2		1	3	1
American Wigeon	1,541	1,492	4,513	4,821	3,586	4,069	2,493	3,125
Northern Shoveler	31	39	80	20	66	12	44	24
Wood Duck	1	3	8	8	12	11	6	5
Redhead	3,910	2,932	2,635	3,337	11,954	6,103	7,288	7,047
Ring-necked Duck	789	447	500	110	182	320	123	345
Canvasback	18,549	21,702	21,349	20,351	12,602	15,414	13,182	11,749
Scaup, sp. all	69,694	106,592	81,337	65,096	72,936	58,580	106,754	118,787
Tufted Duck								
Common Goldeneye	14,697	16,355	13,926	9,580	19,507	17,395	18,008	20,666
Barrow's Goldeneye		1	1		1	1		
Bufflehead	1,706	1,378	1,607	961	2,463	1,549	2,304	1,850
Oldsquaw	3,368	7,509	4,826	7,126	5,998	4,582	3,704	7,330
Harlequin Duck	2					2	5	
Common Eider		3	1	7	1		3	2
King Eider	2		17	18	7	12	11	2
White-winged Scoter	6,782	8,924	7,337	11,766	12,570	8,435	11,223	6,422
Surf Scoter	1,595	1,126	1,005	2,463	528	458	326	1,156
Black Scoter	226	322	93	1,164	289	144	609	58
Scoter, sp.								
Ruddy Duck	161	173	498	523	69	359	40	151
Hooded Merganser	145	231	123	162	135	201	154	362
Smew						1		
Common Merganser	9,700	9,371	14,512	8,333	4,958	20,170	9,978	10,542
Red-breasted Merganser	4,453	2,899	2,552	2,704	1,907	2,288	3,543	3,661
Duck, sp.	9,619	6,223	6,282	1,987	2,138	2,842	3,505	650
Common Gallinule								
American Coot	1,815	817	1,542	1,028	623	744	323	334

TABLE I

	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1972	1973
Common Loon	82	262	63	111	184			95
Red-throated Loon	32	35	7	5	21			20
Red-necked Grebe		3	5		3			
Horned Grebe	631	701	592	405	784			323
Western Grebe								
Pied-billed Grebe	18	22	34	16	77			73
Great Cormorant								
Double-crested Cormorant				1				
Mute Swan	823	667	436	580	496			579
Whistling Swan	2	1	4		14			9
Canada Goose	1,898	3,137	977	1,887	2,702			16,331
Brant	20,107	23,086	12,055	3,314	10,577			3,617
White-fronted Goose								
Snow Goose	2	1	4	10	9			12
Mallard	8,166	11,804	9,376	12,098	12,935			20,645
Black Duck	22,089	29,974	22,380	26,376	29,059			26,096
Mallard x Black				1				16
Gadwall	118	381	113	225	337			377
Pintail	63	102	194	141	336			94
Green-winged Teal	60	211	117	114	187			107
Blue-winged Teal		3			2			
Cinnamon Teal								1
European Wigeon	1	1	1	1	4			
American Wigeon	2,310	2,923	2,043	2,124	3,214			1,783
Northern Shoveler	42	30	37	94	64			394
Wood Duck	11	15	26	24	23			15
Redhead	7,043	11,426	9,538	2,638	7,690			3,707
Ring-necked Duck	360	243	478	285	534			214
Canvasback	11,026	9,363	10,407	8,033	7,627			11,602
Scaup, sp. all	81,447	106,067	85,154	59,341	75,453			110,216
Tufted Duck					1			
Common Goldeneye	14,245	16,539	19,049	12,752	14,933			15,473
Barrow's Goldeneye		1	1					1
Bufflehead	2,104	2,045	2,978	1,901	3,837			5,312
Oldsquaw	3,607	10,000	8,977	3,251	5,725			3,669
Harlequin Duck		6			6			1
Common Eider	18	73	16	5	9			76
King Eider	6	20	3	3	34			1
White-winged Scoter	10,888	8,210	7,400	5,105	3,639			5,854
Surf Scoter	194	876	809	132	1,282			825
Black Scoter	120	672	264	351	173			209
Scoter, sp.								16,940
Ruddy Duck	91	101	204	209	724			135
Hooded Merganser	109	142	281	280	318			181
Smew								
Common Merganser	4,895	7,872	12,207	10,702	15,355			15,197
Red-breasted Merganser	2,370	2,586	2,138	1,749	1,378			1,960
Duck, sp.			628	1,288	3,242			1,514
Common Gallinule					1			1
American Coot	336	619	736	447	1,739			1,826

TABLE I

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Common Loon	69	222	91	102	63	130	72
Red-throated Loon	25	43	80	6	4	15	5
Red-necked Grebe		3	1	2	1	3	1
Horned Grebe	393	756	423	265	143	270	447
Western Grebe							
Pied-billed Grebe	69	134	105	77	38	70	152
Great Cormorant			60	70	28	74	46
Double-crested Cormorant			35		4	27	145
Mute Swan	466	658	667	475	412	865	899
Whistling Swan	4	35	13		6	6	55
Canada Goose	6,982	20,574	15,651	12,102	13,940	32,373	67,046
Brant	12,251	16,305	9,268	3,439	3,218	17,677	14,218
White-fronted Goose							
Snow Goose	1	10	13	9	4	12	60
Mallard	17,108	18,979	21,461	17,825	16,887	19,492	23,949
Black Duck	21,668	19,735	15,265	18,050	11,090	17,387	20,655
Mallard x Black	3	18	75	21	9	26	43
Gadwall	391	987	678	480	388	526	1,032
Pintail	171	421	283	190	256	237	355
Green-winged Teal	166	413	252	81	150	141	222
Blue-winged Teal	21	32	5				11
Cinnamon Teal							
European Wigeon		1	2			1	1
American Wigeon	2,762	2,213	3,207	1,271	1,992	2,378	2,100
Northern Shoveler	483	192	323	303	172	109	90
Wood Duck	18	63	25	10	9	44	27
Redhead	7,593	6,658	12,899	8,359	5,877	4,148	7,265
Ring-necked Duck	318	205	384	103	289	68	355
Canvasback	11,505	19,554	20,154	10,552	6,534	7,857	11,153
Scaup, sp. all	96,665	76,157	50,442	86,611	31,635	36,677	41,544
Tufted Duck							
Common Goldeneye	9,651	10,832	11,348	10,967	12,324	12,230	17,493
Barrow's Goldeneye				1	3	3	3
Bufflehead	5,678	3,733	3,426	3,217	3,189	4,264	4,403
Oldsquaw	2,455	2,271	2,750	1,965	4,001	1,498	3,583
Harlequin Duck	1	1	1	1	3	1	
Common Eider	57	8	37	30	372	76	11
King Eider	15	20	5	7	17	2	3
White-winged Scoter	7,942	4,728	9,406	11,597	2,339	3,489	11,422
Surf Scoter	1,517	689	2,367	947	543	968	444
Black Scoter	280	780	470	218	756	1,740	95
Scoter, sp.	465	2,387	677	7,385	240	2,541	2,000
Ruddy Duck	232	742	820	275	36	332	253
Hooded Merganser	185	198	99	82	41	396	328
Smew							
Common Merganser	18,168	8,083	11,719	10,000	7,448	9,346	6,116
Red-breasted Merganser	1,619	2,386	1,949	1,425	3,568	1,885	1,740
Duck, sp.	165	1,631	50	2,090	535	1,424	
Common Gallinule						1	
American Coot	1,583	3,043	3,561	2,085	1,335	1,424	3,134



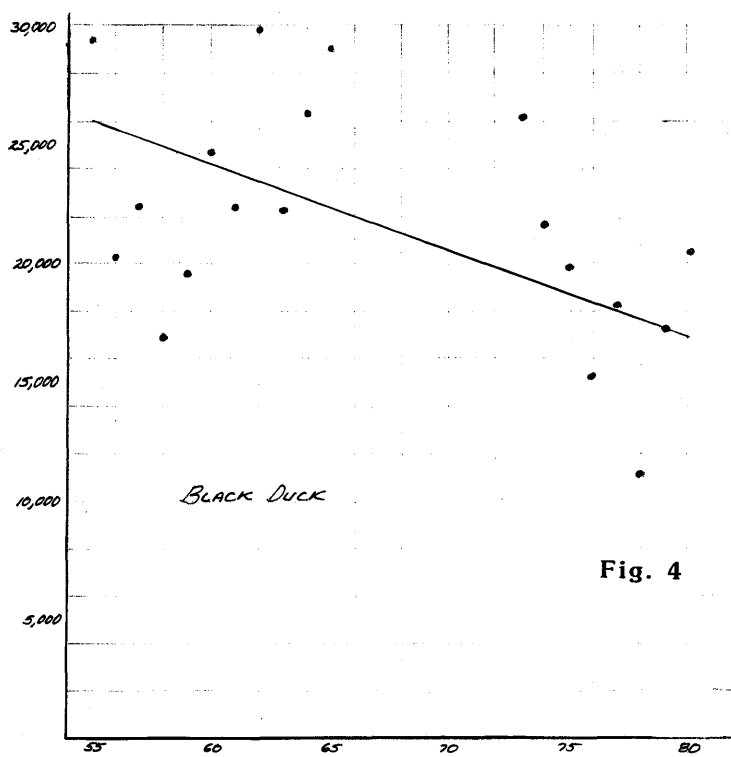


Fig. 4

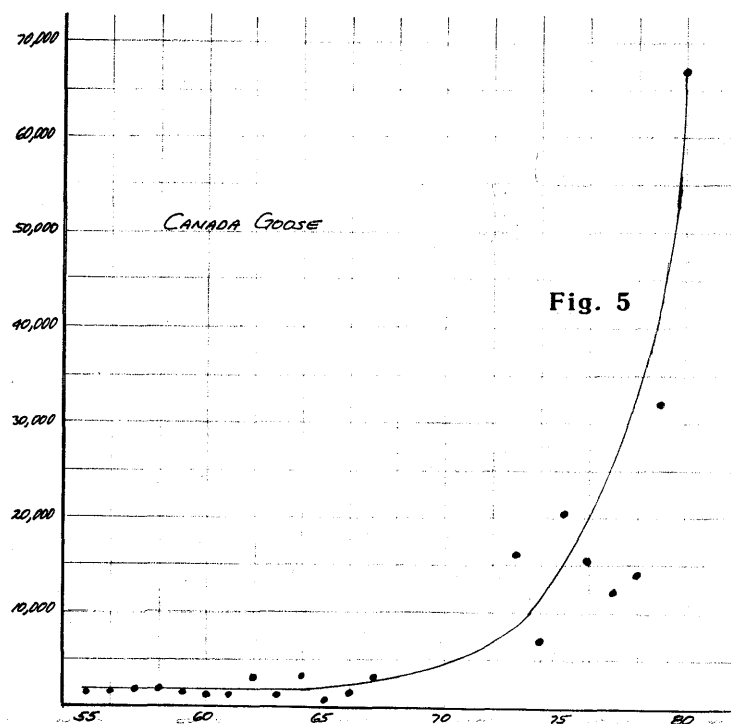


Fig. 5

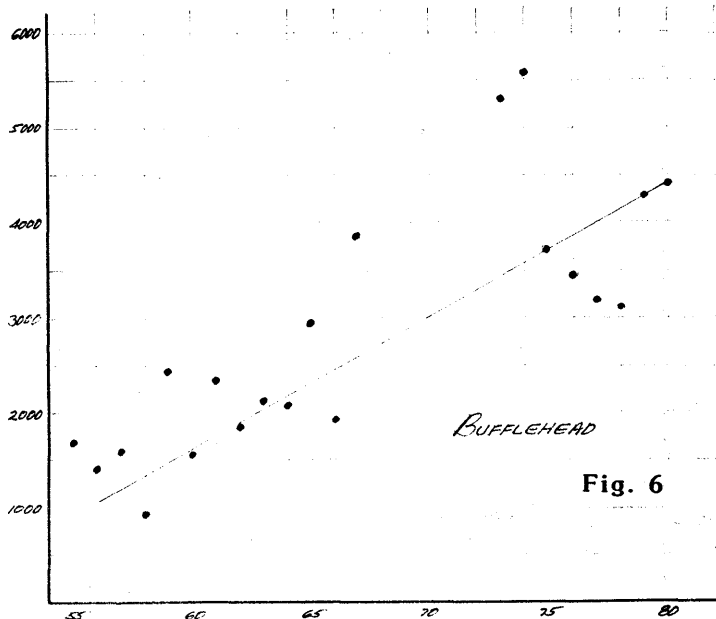


Fig. 6

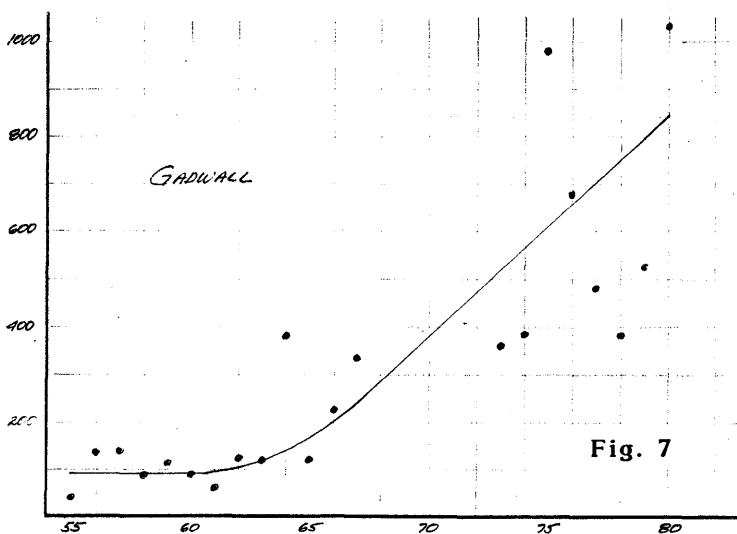


Fig. 7

but the Black Duck does not appear to be declining as rapidly as feared.

The explosion in overwintering Canada Geese (Fig. 5), caused by changes in agricultural methods and increased use of refuges, is part of a continent wide trend.

The Gadwall (Fig. 6) and Bufflehead (Fig. 7) continue to increase, while the Oldsquaw has declined and leveled off.