

REFUGE CORNER

There are three national wildlife refuges in Alabama: Wheeler at Decatur; Eufaula at Eufaula; and Choctaw in Clarke Co., headquartered at Jackson. Periodically we will hear from these important bird refuges on their projects, problems, general bird migration, etc. In mid-June each was asked to comment on summer nesting projects, the effect on the 1971 rule that crops could not be leveled and to give a general discussion about the refuge. Reports were received from Wheeler and Eufaula. They follow.

Wheeler NWR. Waterfowl was short during the 1971-72 season with only about 35,000 Canada Geese, 1500 Blue and Snow Geese, and 46,000 ducks present. This represents a continuing drop in all waterfowl and can be compared with about 38,000 geese and 60,000 ducks the previous year, a goose peak of 60,000 back in 1963, and a duck peak of about 93,000 in the mid-50's.

At least where geese are concerned, this seems largely due to the short stopping of the birds from new management areas in northern Ohio, western Indiana, western Pennsylvania, etc. However, a ruling that crops could not be leveled during the 1971-72 season almost certainly had an effect. Food production was unusually high due to an especially good agricultural crop and much of the unleveled food remained uneaten at the end of the winter, an unprecedented situation here. This ruling though has been recently revised, and we feel that most of the Wheeler crop can again be leveled in the fall of 1972. At the present writing (June 20) it looks as though drought may seriously reduce crop yields.

Wood Duck nesting during the summer of 1971 seemed unusually high and refuge nest boxes showed over 25% use, the highest experienced here. Though boxes have not yet been checked this summer, 1972 also seems high with many broods of young Mallards and Wood Ducks noted.

Again, Wheeler Refuge had a YCC program during the summer of 1972. Unlike the resident camp used in 1971, this was a non-residential program with 20 high school students, boys and girls, reporting for work each morning, then returning home at the end of the work day. The youngsters cut out walking trails, improved the headquarters nature trail, aided with dove banding, cleared back road edges, bush hooked willows in the dewatered units and gathered up rubbish all over the refuge.

Ron Bisbee transferred to Okefenokee Refuge during the early fall of 1971, and has been replaced as recreation specialist by Harold Johnson. Henry Grammer, who has been at Wheeler almost since its origin, retired June 30.

An effort to revive the spur across the Flint Creek Embayment connecting Point Mallard Park with Interstate 65 has evidently been dropped after a storm of protests from various organizations and individuals. Presently there is an effort to route a six or eight lane connection between Interstate 65 and Huntsville across parts of the refuge. This is a serious threat that has not yet been resolved. The BSF&W has taken the position that it will freely grant right-of-way across those parts of the refuge lying north of State Highway 20, but will strenuously oppose any effort to place the highway south of Highway 20.

Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr., Refuge Manager, WNWNR, P. O. Box 1643, Decatur, 35601.

Eufaula NWR. The Canada Geese here are a combination of migratory geese and a resident flock of giant Canada Geese. The number of migratory geese which visit the refuge (around 200) has rapidly decreased while the number of

resident giant Canada Geese has slowly increased. We feel we are making progress because we are slowly establishing a resident flock in an area where these geese were once found in great numbers. Overall we have increased our numbers of wintering ducks, around 35,000. Our peak population during the 1971-72 season was only 23,800. Although we are not positive about the cause of this decrease we feel that the unusual weather up north this past winter had a lot to do with it. The coot population has followed the duck population and also has increased during the past years. They peaked at 7000 in 1971-72 and is the largest number yet recorded.

We don't know how the "knocking down" rule will affect us. We have gone to millet and milo in some areas in order to see if this will work better since we cannot knock the corn down, and we are also trying to get some natural foods to grow in several areas.

Due to the dry weather we have had for the past few months (June 19) much has been accomplished. The impoundments on the Alabama side dried out enough to be disked in order to promote growth of natural foods such as smartweed. The reservoir was not raised to its high summer water level mark until after the goose nesting season. This will finally provide us with an idea of just how much damage flooding of the nests does do to goose production each year. Also this storm free weather has provided the Mourning Dove with a perfect nesting season and it is quite evident since we have banded 486 in the last two weeks and only 25 of those were adults. Although we have accomplished a lot in this good weather our crops are looking pretty bad and are in desperate need of rain.

On June 16 we completed our second Wood Duck box check and we have produced the same amount as last year at this time, 438. We are however still having trouble with Starlings ruining Wood Duck nests by nesting on top of them.

We have had an interesting visitor lately. During the months of February, March and April, a wounded immature Golden Eagle made its home here. Shot by a hunter in Union Springs, Alabama, he was brought to us with a broken wing and several gashes. The wing healed and the eagle was released, but would not fly. Finally on May 1 he took off and left us just before we were going to turn him over to the Montgomery Zoo. The only reason we could come up with for his not flying sooner was the fact that he evidently lived a life of leisure. He decided to leave the day we plowed up the field he had been using as his home.

Jimmie L. Tisdale, Manager, ENWR, Box 258, Eufaula 36027.
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AOS Treasurer's Report
Summary - April 24, 1971 to April 24, 1972

Balance in Checking Account, April 24, 1971	\$ 482.17
Income	885.36
Total	<u>\$1367.53</u>
Expenses	- 755.20
Total	<u>\$ 612.33</u>
Balance in Checking Account, April 24, 1972	\$ 612.33
Balance in Savings Account, March 31, 1972	451.90
Total assets	<u>\$1064.23</u>

Sybil Hanks, Treasurer