

POOR START TO DUCK SEASON

Shooters largely had themselves to blame last December when some of the poorest ever wild duck opening shoots took place. With a lot of ducks concentrated on favoured shooting sites, such as Gundaring Lake in the Wagin district, trigger-happy types opened up well before the official opening time of 5 a.m. This resulted in great masses of ducks rising and escaping in the darkness to nearby sanctuaries. This was, of course, fine for the ducks but we have still not convinced many late sleepers among the shooters that the ducks were there in the first place! This sort of thing occurred at Benger Swamp in the Harvey district (for the first time for many years) and at Nonalling and Whitewater Lakes in the Yealering district as well as at Gundaring. Shooters also "beat the gun" at Wannamal Lake between Chittering and Moora.

Inspections of refuge lakes since then have revealed high concentrations of ducks, grey teal predominating, and have offset to some extent shooters' fears that something cataclysmic had happened to our duck population. Subsequent reports from out-of-the-way areas (including the sandplain lakes north of Eneabba and inland from Jurien Bay, and some of the south coast estuaries) mention large to extremely massive concentrations of ducks. These sightings draw attention to the great need for detailed information on waterfowl distribution in times such as these of high aridity in large sections of the coastal plain and wheatbelt. Attention will be given to this work when a full-time research programme is developed, but interim reports are badly needed to pinpoint the areas important as drought refuges. Eventually, regular surveys will be made from the air for this has been shown to be the most economical and the most efficient method of assessing major waterfowl distribution patterns, but, in the meantime, reports of any large concentrations of ducks would be invaluable.