

A REVIEW OF THE 1971/72 South-West Duck Hunting Season

by Dr T. L. Riggert

The combination of a poor waterfowl breeding season during the winter of 1971, and heavy rains in the latter part of November, resulted in below normal bags at the opening shoots of the annual waterfowl hunting season.

Bag checks by nine Fauna Wardens showed that 288 shooters took 1,150 ducks; thus averaging approximately two birds per shooter for each of the afternoon and morning shoots. There were some exceptions when shooters concentrated their efforts on stock dams or small saline lakes where full bags of maned geese or mountain duck were taken. Many duck bands have been received from Honorary Wardens and shooters, and the co-operation of these people is greatly appreciated. Please return all duck bands as soon as possible, as this information is of paramount importance to the waterfowl research programme.

As the season progressed, bag checks showed a general increase in the numbers taken, and grey teal was the most prevalent species in the bag. During the last two weeks of the season, shooters had little difficulty in obtaining their quota and concentrated mainly on the black duck. Although the season got off to a slow start, for those shooters who persisted, the shooting was found to be excellent and the birds in prime condition.

The response of duck shooters to the licensing requirements (which came into effect this year), proved to be most satisfactory. The Department's Supervising Warden, Mr S. W. Bowler, said that field checks by his staff and by Honorary Wardens had shown that very few shooters were found not to be carrying a duck shooter's license. The total number of licenses sold slightly exceeded 5,000 which means that over \$10,000 has been deposited in the Fauna Conservation Trust Fund for use on conservation projects. The use of the money in this trust will be discussed by the Western Australian Wildlife Authority and recommendations made to the Hon. Minister for Fisheries and Fauna.

The research information cards which have been returned since the closure of the duck hunting season show that shooters concentrated on three main areas this year. In the North, the centre of shooting activities was in an area from Morawa to Coorow, with good isolated shooting spots on the lower Murchison and Lake Wannamal. Shooters from the Metropolitan area concentrated mainly on the Wagin, Katanning, and Dumbleyung areas. Fauna Wardens were actively engaged in checking duck shooters' licenses on Lakes Ewlyamatup, Coyrecup and the Cobline River Flats, east of



Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*). Overall, this was the main species taken in the last season

Katanning, throughout the entire season. Good isolated shoots, especially on maned geese, were also reported in the southern Lake Grace area. The third area on which shooters congregated was the wetlands around Esperance. The large quantities of surface water in this area made opening shoots poor and there were many reports of young birds still unable to fly. However, this situation had improved by the 1st of February and the main species of ducks taken were black duck, grey teal and some mountain duck.

On the 17th and 18th of February, an aerial survey was carried out to assess the number of waterfowl still remaining in the shooting area. It was immediately noticeable that the high temperatures of December and early February had dried up vast areas of wetlands that had been covered during the October aerial survey.

The wetland areas severely effected were Wagin, Kojonup, Cranbrook, Lake Muir, and the northern region of Lake Grace. Good surface water was still present east of Katanning and along the southern coast to Esperance. However, east of Esperance the surface water along the coast diminished rapidly and little could be observed beyond 50 miles east of Esperance.

The Swan Coastal Plain with its estuary systems is carrying large populations of ducks and swans. This is the normal migrating area for waterfowl which leave the inland drought areas and reside on the coastal areas throughout the summer. No doubt the massive drainage programmes on the Swan Coastal Plain have greatly reduced the summer habitat available to these birds. For this reason the Mandurah estuary has been set aside as a waterfowl sanctuary.

In general, the aerial survey showed that large concentrations of waterfowl were still present in the South-West and, if winter conditions prove favourable, bag quotas and the length of the shooting season may be extended in the forthcoming year. No doubt the restrictions which have been placed upon duck shooting over the past three years are now paying dividends, as a large breeding population of birds is still present. The present day total protection for this breeding stock, indicates a bright future for waterfowl in the coming year.