

PRE DUCK SEASON WATERFOWL SURVEY

This year the waterfowl survey, conducted by Research Officer T.L. Riggert, was divided into two periods, a preliminary investigation and a more detailed final investigation. The preliminary flights took place during the first week of October when waterfowl are rearing broods and wetlands are still at their winter high levels. These flights were used for a comparative basis to establish brood development and the extent of evaporation in wetland areas, with the rising temperatures in the spring. The main observational flights were carried out between November 10-14 and consisted of four flights covering the major duck shooting areas governed by the duck shooting regulations of Western Australia.

The first flight took in the Northern Coastal Lakes from the metropolitan area to Snag Island and across to Three Springs, Carnamah, Moora, Northam and York. This area, which is usually the driest of the surveyed areas, showed considerable ground water and many small groups of waterfowl. Both swans and ducks had young in the latter stages of development which would be flying in early January.

The second flight from Lake Mears near Beverley to Cunderdin, Oak Park, Wongan Hills, Moora, Dalwallinu, Tammin, Narambeen, Kondinin and Quairading showed considerably more water than area 1 and excellent numbers of ducks were recorded with numerous young swans and ducklings still present with parent birds. This area in the previous year was almost completely dry and waterfowl breeding was extremely limited. However, this year an excellent breeding season has taken place. From reports received from residents in these areas the ground waters have only receded a few inches during the past weeks which has been due to the abnormally low temperatures for this time of the year. It is, therefore, felt that by mid January the more permanent lakes will still contain ample water.

Flight three, which included Perth, Narrogin, Wagin, Dumbleyung, Cranbrook, Albany, Lake Grace, Yealering and Pingelly showed few ducks on the preliminary flights, but on the final flight a few concentrations of ducks were observed. In general, in this area it appears that an excellent breeding season has occurred. However, there are still many young birds and especially many young swans. The wickepin area does not appear to have received as much water as surrounding areas, but many stock dams contained large numbers of ducks

and geese.

Flight four from Perth to Mandurah along the Serpentine River, Harvey Estuary, Lake Clifton, Lake Preston, Benger Swamp, Wannerup and Vasse Estuary, Katanning Lakes, Lake Muir, Walpole, Broke Inlet and other surrounding wetlands, showed concentrated groups of waterfowl which indicates that the main breeding season is not yet completed. Many of the far southern lakes have very few waterfowl present indicating that the water conditions further north are still holding.

The aerial survey has shown that in general an exceptional breeding season has occurred throughout the surveyed areas. Many waterfowl are still rearing broods of varying ages and local residents report that freshly hatched ducklings have been sighted in their areas. Swans are still rearing their cygnets which range in age from 1-2 weeks to the flying stages. It takes 122 days for a young swan to develop to the flying stage and, therefore, many swans will not be capable of flight until late summer. The water situation is excellent in all areas and shooters can expect an excellent season.

DUCK SHOOTING SEASON

The opening date for this season's duck shoot has not yet been decided but is likely to be sometime in January. No duck shooter's license will be necessary for this season but it is almost certain that they will be required for the following season.

The duck shooter's guide will be available to wardens, inspectors and other interested parties immediately the opening date has been announced.