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BANDING DUCKS ON MALHEUR LAKE

During the past few years as the waterfowl population of the country decreased so noticeably, it has become necessary for game experts to collect more complete data on the breeding and feeding habits as well as the travels of birds. As it is impossible to follow any flock of birds ~~migrating~~ from one place to another, some method of tagging these travelers was necessary so as to know the migration routes from the summer homes to the winter feeding grounds.

The simplest and best method hit upon was a little aluminum band like a bracelet that could be fitted loosely around the leg of the bird. Each band had a different number stamped in the metal with the words "Biological Survey, Washington, D. C."

Many thousands of waterfowl have been live-trapped and banded on the breeding grounds and in various places during migration. Since many ducks and geese are killed during the open season, thousands of bands have been taken off by hunters and returned to the Biological Survey. By checking the records, many facts have been discovered that lead to the better protection of various species.

The common idea is that ducks and geese move north in spring and south in the fall. Banding records show that birds move in all directions seeking areas where food is abundant. A large number of mallards banded in Montana migrate both west and south. On the other hand, redheads banded in the Bear River marshes of Utah have for some reason a very unusual schedule of travel. They move north and then east across the northern part of the country and spend the winter on the south Atlantic coast.

Since Malheur Lake Reservation is both a breeding area for waterfowl and also a resting and feeding area for flocks travel-

ing north and south, it is a good place to trap and band waterfowl and collect facts relating to the life histories of these birds.

Near the mouth of Blitzen River where it flows into the bed of Malheur Lake, the Biological Survey has a trapping and banding station. This is handled by Mr. Philip A. DuMont. These pens are covered with wire, and a runway from the outside leads to the point of a V with a little opening where ducks can enter easily but can't find their way out. Grain is scattered inside the pens and outside this V-shaped entrance. A few ducks inside with plenty to eat soon attract others. From the large enclosure, the birds are driven into a smaller pen where they are caught, banded, the numbers and species recorded and then released.

One might think that when these wild birds are caught and banded the fright would keep them from coming back. Such is not the case because there are many repeats. A good dinner often makes more of an impression than the fear of being trapped.

Frequently a duck enters a trap showing a band on the leg that is well worn. The records may show that this bird was banded two, three or four years before. It has been lucky enough to survive the many guns of an open season. Normally a duck's life is not more than two to four years, yet some have been banded and returned, showing that they have lived at least seven or eight years.

The majority of birds banded at Malheur Lake during the early part of the season are mallards and pintails. The returns on the bands of these birds that have been killed show that a large majority were shot in the Sacramento Valley and south to southern California.