

[From Spring 1993]

Biology Briefs: Waterfowl

Although most of the migratory waterfowl have left for the season, refuge waterfowl populations were higher in November and December of 1992 than have been present for quite some time. Waterfowl numbers began increasing in September as the first fall migrants began arriving; numbers exceeded 3,150 with green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, and mallards as the most significant species. Overall, December waterfowl numbers increased 11 percent from 1991 and 36 percent from 1990.

Peak numbers for geese increased 9 percent from last December with 10,328 birds observed. Total duck numbers showed a 12 percent increase over the previous year, with 7811 ducks in December 1991 and 8866 in December 1992. Black ducks and pintails were the most abundant species, with other significant species including: mallard, gadwall, green-winged teal, wigeon, shoveler, blue-winged teal, wood duck, bufflehead, red-breasted merganser, ruddy duck, scaup, hooded merganser, and ring-necked duck.

Other species also sighted this year were common merganser, redhead, and canvasback.

The December swan population increased significantly from 396 individuals in 1991 to 486 in 1992. For those interested in the "out of the ordinary," two fulvous whistling ducks, a black swan, and two white pelicans were also sighted on the refuge this winter. Overall, migratory waterfowl have fared well this winter on Assateague Island.

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