

[From Winter 1993 - 1994]

## **Rainfall Replenishes Refuge Impoundments**

Wintering waterfowl have arrived on Chincoteague Refuge in full force, despite the fact that near drought conditions threatened early fall migrants. The refuge's impoundments, which traditionally offer birds exceptional feeding and resting opportunities, are hosting numerous ducks and geese this winter. The newest impoundment, "Farm Fields," provided feeding grounds for over 1,500 snow geese in November.

The impoundments receive water exclusively by natural processes such as rain, snow, dew, etc. Therefore, an unusually dry summer and fall caused water levels to fall below normal in all of the refuge impoundments. In October, as a response to the dry conditions, refuge staff allowed bay water into certain impoundments as fall waterfowl migration was underway. Subsequently, much needed rains complemented the efforts and water depths increased to see more suitable levels for waterfowl use. Immediately, waterfowl numbers began to increase.

Although overall water depths still remain below prescribed levels, the average number of geese and ducks during November of 1993 was higher than numbers observed during the same time in 1992. In November of 1992, the average number of snow geese and Canada geese combined was 5,437, as compared to 10,611 in 1993. Likewise, the average number of ducks increased slightly from 8,175 to 9,887. It is speculated that a good breeding year accounts for the increase in waterfowl numbers.

The winter of 1993 has been a good year for observing waterfowl at Chincoteague Refuge. Take advantage of bird watching opportunities this winter, because it will not be long before most of the birds leave in preparation for another nesting season.

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