

[From Winter 1999]

A Friendlier Refuge

Waterfowl returning to the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in 1999 discovered something they didn't find in great supply last year -- WATER!

Last year's drought seemed like a long-forgotten memory, since the hurricanes in late August and September provided much needed rainfall to the refuge. Although there has been very little rainfall since early September, water levels have remained high enough in the impoundments to provide good conditions for migrating and wintering waterfowl. The result has been some of the highest counts of waterfowl in several years.

A peak of almost 20,000 ducks were counted on the refuge during the November surveys. Over 5,000 northern pintails, 3,000 black ducks and significantly higher counts of several other species have brought back fond memories to some of the older staff who still remember the old days, "when the sky was black with ducks."

The snow goose population also increased significantly over last year, with close to 20,000 geese observed this year compared to only about 10,000 last year.

The moral to this story is, if you have enough water and good food to eat, the birds will come.

Happy birding!

Tom Penn
Biological Technician, CNWR