

Vol. 20 Nos. 7 & 8

July-August
1968

Conservation Pledge

I give my
pledge as an American
to save and faithfully to
defend from waste the
natural resources of
my country—its soil
and minerals, its
forests, waters
and wildlife

*Published Bi-Monthly
in the interest of conser-
vation of Louisiana's nat-
ural resources by the
Wild Life and Fisheries
Commission, Peabody
Hall, Capitol Station,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
70804.*



A handful of goslings. These young Canada geese were hatched on Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge where efforts are being made to eventually build up resident flocks of princely Canada geese which once were numerous in Louisiana. After banding, they will be allowed to mature and become free fliers. It is hoped that efforts being made at the refuge will eventually attract more Canada geese to their traditional wintering grounds. At the present time, only an estimated 7,000 Canada geese winter in Louisiana. In former years, their numbers went into the tens of thousands.

LOUISIANA Conservationist

LOUISIANA WILD LIFE AND FISHERIES COMMISSION

400 Royal Street, New Orleans, La. 70130

*Subscription Free to Louisiana Residents
Upon Written Request*

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Forms 3579 to be sent to LOUISIANA WILD LIFE AND FISHERIES COMMISSION, 400 Royal St., New Orleans, Louisiana 70130.

Second-Class Postage Paid at Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Home Grown!

CAJUN CANADAS

Ted Joanen
and
Howard Dupuie

THE CANADA GOOSE, once a common winter resident to the coastal marshes of Louisiana has declined over the years to just a few thousand birds. The reduction in Louisiana's wintering population has been brought about by the establishment of the goose management units in Missouri, Illinois and Wisconsin. These refuges not only provided protection, but also farming programs were initiated to entice and hold these geese in the areas.

Wildlife workers in Missouri report that Canada geese were a rare sight in the Swan Lake Refuge area prior to the establishment of this sanctuary. In 1939-40, small flocks passed over the refuge during the fall migration with some staying over-night to feed in the adjoining fields. The Swan Lake flock actually began its build up in 1941 when 800 geese used the area. Populations continued to increase until 1955 when this peak population numbered 133,000 birds.

As the population increased on these northern refuges and required more food so did the farming practices. This brought about a steady decline in the number of Canada geese coming south to Louisiana. It is believed that if this trend continues the southern migration of Canada geese may very well terminate in Missouri.

In an effort to rebuild this population in Louisiana, the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission along with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service have initiated several programs aimed at reestablishing Canada geese to a huntable population in the state. There have been several approaches to this problem. First, the season has been closed for several years on shooting Canada geese in the state. It was thought that by eliminating gunning pressure this would allow the remigrate migrant population a chance to build back up. Second, the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service sponsored a "stepping stone" program from the Missouri Refuge down to the terminal migration point in the coastal marshes of Louisiana. This involved trucking in immature Canada geese and placing them at intermediate points along the traditional migratory route south of the refuge in Missouri.

The theory behind this program was that the young birds without prior migratory experience



An angry Canada goose causes a biologist to duck as it makes repeated assaults on the biologist who is in the act of banding young geese that have been hatched on the refuge.



This photograph shows a nesting Canada goose on the Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge. During the nesting season of 1968, 95 nests were located on the 100-acre pasture.

would accept and return to these new release sites since no definite migratory patterns had been formulated. This program has been successful, but only on a very limited scale.

Trapping operations on the Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge indicated the majority of these transplanted birds wintered on the refuge the following year rather than come farther south.

Third, the Louisiana Wild Life and Fisheries Commission chose to acquire adult birds and investigate the possibility of establishing a non-migratory nesting colony of Canada geese in Louisiana. This program began in 1960 on Rockefeller Refuge when 26 wild Canada geese were obtained from the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin.

Since that time several hundred birds have been acquired from private propagators in Minnesota and Regina, Saskatchewan. All of the adult birds obtained were permanently pinioned and released in a 100-acre pasture near the refuge headquarters.

In the spring of 1961, one pair nested and from this nesting attempt, three young were produced. As these birds became acclimated to the climate and temperatures of the coastal marshes and



The stately Canada goose once wintered in Louisiana in great numbers and was considered the prince among geese in the state by waterfowlers.

with additional birds being added each year the number of nesting pairs increased. During the nesting season of 1968, 95 nests were located in the 100-acre pasture. The young birds raised from the previous years were banded and permitted to fly.

These birds are free-flyers moving off the refuge for several miles each day to feeding and resting areas on the Grand Lake and White Lake marshes. Birds return to the refuge in late evening, feed and roost. With the adult birds held flightless, young free flyers showed no tendency to migrate and remained in Louisiana year round.

During the nesting season of 1965, several pairs of free-flyers established territories and nested on the refuge for the first time. Since those first nesting attempts in 1965, these birds have returned to the refuge and each year nested and brought off their young. The number of free-flying nesting pairs is increasing each year.

This year several pairs were located nesting off the refuge on the Grand Chenier ridge. In order to reduce the mortality in the young, as each nest hatch the young birds are picked up and brought to the holding pens at the refuge headquarters.

In an attempt to increase the egg production from the captive flock, the first clutch of eggs from all nests found are removed and placed in an incubator. Birds, after a short period of time, will lay a second clutch of eggs. This second clutch is allowed to remain and hatch under the parent bird. Using this method, the production from a captive flock can be almost doubled. This renesting occurs in nature in the event the first nest is lost to predators or unusual climatic conditions.

Each year efforts are made to acquire birds with the hopes that they will acclimate themselves to the humid temperatures and eventually nest in the Louisiana marshes. This year 500 young Canada geese, three to five days old, were purchased from Regina, Saskatchewan and flown by commercial airlines to Louisiana.

Birds will be added to the flock already established here at Rockefeller Refuge and it is hoped that these birds without prior migratory experience will establish themselves as nesters here in the coastal marshes of the state.

Once a suitable number of nesting pairs has become established on Rockefeller, a portion of these Louisiana Canadas will be moved on to other refuges in the state and this process repeated until the entire potential of this program has been reached. The results of this program have proven it to be the most successful method used as yet to reestablish Canada geese in Louisiana.

These home grown Canadas will serve as a nucleus for the rebuilding program along the coastal marshes of Louisiana. It will be from these birds that the Louisiana hunter may one day again hunt the elusive Canada goose. However, rather than the migratory variety a true resident, the Cajun Canada. ❖



At Rockefeller Wildlife Refuge in southwest Louisiana efforts are being made to rebuild Louisiana's wintering flocks of Canada geese. Migrants today are seldom more than 7,000. Initial efforts consisted of importing Canada geese from northern states and the geese were pinioned. A fenced 100-acre pasture was established for the experiment. This photograph shows the area at the refuge being used in the Canada goose program. In the background are refuge buildings.