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RECORDS OF DUCKS KILLED OVER BAITED WATERS

An interesting record on duck shooting last Fall has just been published by the Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture. The new regulations by the federal government have outlawed baiting of ducks. Last year, baiting was permitted under providing the holders of permits kept daily records and made reports at the close of the season.

The total number of gunners last year ~~over~~ over baited areas was 44,349. The total bag was 673,083 birds. The records show that in two states of the Union there were more hunters shooting ducks over baited waters and more waterfowl killed than in all the other states combined. These two states are Illinois and California.

In California, there were 10,476 gunners who killed 310,258 birds. Illinois came second with a total bag of 166,014 birds by 12,958 hunters. Other states where permit holders reported total kills of more than 20,000 ducks were: Washington, where 2,477 hunters killed 74,528 ducks; Oregon, with 2,421 hunters and 62,183 ducks; Maryland, with 4,371 hunters and 34,146 ducks; and Missouri, 1,804 hunters and 20,538 ducks.

Throughout the country, there ~~is~~^{was} of course a much larger number of hunters and many more ducks and geese killed, but these gunners were not shooting over baited areas. Mallards made up the largest share of the bag from the baited areas, the total of 237,893 including 135,710 reported from Illinois. Pintails were next with a total for the country of 187,452, which included

127,958 reported from California.

The concentration of waterfowl in Illinois and California is easily explained. The Mississippi Valley is the great fly-way of the Middle West, and the waterways through this State are a natural attraction. It is the same in California where the main duck areas are centered in Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys and the Bay region. This is a sort of a bottle-neck where all the flocks from the North and as far east as Montana pour in during the winter.

Though practiced in only a few areas at the close of the World War, baiting once started, soon became wide spread. Gunners who baited had a tremendous advantage over those who did not, and when one hunter started baiting, others shooting in the same area felt more or less compelled to follow.

Opposition to baiting grew until in 1933, an investigation was requested by the Advisory Board of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The investigation showed that there was as much natural food today per bird as there ever was, but baiting attracted the birds away from a good supply of natural food and held them in areas not adapted for wintering waterfowl. Since nearly all of the gunners ceased to put out food at the close of the gunning season, the birds delayed in their migratory flight then often suffered from cold and starvation.

The great quantities of corn and wheat scattered as an attraction to ducks, together with the use of a large number of live decoys, quickly tamed the wild birds so that they would light within a few feet of the blinds. Complaint has often been made that the methods of baiting have commercialized duck shooting to such an extent that it had to be stopped.