

Protection of waterfowl species in Europe

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The Hunting Rationalization Research Group of the International Waterfowl Research Bureau made an inquiry on waterfowl hunting in Europe in 1969—70. Swans were protected the whole year round nearly everywhere, geese in five countries, and waders, with the exception of Woodcock and snipes, in ten areas. Although all surface-feeding and diving ducks were nowhere fully protected, several species had no open season in many northern and western European countries and Czechoslovakia. There was large variation in open and closed seasons between different countries, but considerably less variation between different species or groups of waterfowl in the same country. The average open season for ducks had decreased by 11 days from 1966 to 1969.

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In 1969, the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) established the Hunting Rationalization Research Group to collect information on waterfowl hunting in different countries and work out measures for improving the rationalization of waterfowl shooting (see LAMPIO 1974 a). The group made an extensive questionnaire which in 1970 was sent to all European countries. This report on the protection of waterfowl species is based on answers to this inquiry. Unless stated otherwise, the information concerns the hunting season 1969—70.

Waterfowl species are protected at three different levels. Some species are fully protected, i.e. they may never be killed without special authorization for each particular case. As can be seen from Figs. 1—3, this was true nearly always for swans, frequently for waders, and sometimes for ducks and geese. The commonest level of protection is a closed

season for some part of the year and an open season for the rest. This means that the species concerned may be hunted during the open season by anybody who has hunting rights in the area concerned and owns the ordinary shooting licence, as there is no special waterfowl hunting licence in any European country (VALENTINČIČ 1974). The third possibility is a complete lack of protection, which means that the species can be killed without any permit any time of the year. This level was met only exceptionally in European waterfowl.

Fig. 1 illustrates the situation for swans and geese. Deviating from full protection, Spain was the only country where there was an open season for swans. In Portugal and Malta there was no protection at all, but swans do not live in these countries, according to the reports. In Ireland swans lacked legal protection but were not hunted. In Poland *Cygnus cygnus* and *C. bewickii* were traditionally but not legally protected.

For geese there was full protection

for all species only in five countries or other areas having their own game laws. On the other hand, there was no protection at all in Malta, where no waterfowl species was protected at any time of the year. The other unprotected area was Alsace (France), where, however, all geese were protected the whole year round in 1972.

As can be seen from Fig. 2, there was no area where all surface-feeding and diving ducks were fully protected. We can see, however, that there were quite a few areas in northern and western Europe where several species had no open season. The same was true of Czechoslovakia. In contrast, Malta was the only country where ducks had no legal protection. In addition, *Mergus serrator* and *M. merganser* were unprotected in Scotland.

Coots were fully protected in four countries. In addition, *Fulica cristata* had no open season in 13 other areas. All coots or *F. atra* had no protection in five areas.

The wader situation is reviewed in Fig. 3. Except for Woodcock and snipes, ten countries had protected waders all the year round. In addition to this, all waders but one or two species were fully protected in four other countries. There was no protection at all, on the other hand, in Malta, Ireland and Alsace. In Ireland and Alsace waders, however, in practice had the benefit of a closed season.

As we have seen, waterfowl are normally protected by a closed season, lasting at least as long as the breeding season; the rest of the year is then an open season. Yet there is great variation as far as closed seasons are concerned. Differences are met with less frequently as regards various species and groups of waterfowl but more commonly between different countries.

Open seasons for geese may be used as

an example of hunting regulation. In Spitzbergen (Norway) and Iceland the open seasons were exceptionally long, ten and seven months respectively. This lacks practical significance, however, as there were only 50 waterfowl hunters in Spitzbergen and 600 in Iceland, whereas the number in the whole of Europe was as high as over four million.

In the other northern countries, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the FRG the open seasons for geese were only 2—4 months long. Less than half a year was allowed also in Denmark, Holland, Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland and Spain. The seasons were 6—7 months long in Poland, the GDR, Rumania, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, South Tirol, Greece and Bulgaria. In Austria and Turkey geese were hunted for over seven months, and in France and Yugoslavia for eight and a half months. In Alsace and Malta there was no closed season, but in Åland (Finland), the Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Moldavian SSR and Luxembourg no open season existed for geese.

Open seasons for ducks, coots and waders were usually rather similar to those for geese (see LAMPIO 1974 b). The average length of the duck season was 164 days, which means that the open season had shortened by 11 days since 1966, when a similar analysis was made (HOFFMAN 1966).

The Hunting Rationalization Research Group also listed other kinds of regulations established in different European countries for protecting waterfowl against overshooting and other harmful effects of hunting. These regulations concern e.g. circumstances in which shooting is permitted and forbidden, as well as permitted and forbidden hunting techniques. Common practices in waterfowl hunting, kill statistics, bag limits, sale, export, import and hunting rights were also studied (for de-

passa sekä Tshekkoslovakiassa oli lukuisten lajien metsästäminen kielletty. Metsästysajat vaihtelivat suuresti eri alueiden välillä, mutta vähemmän eri vesilinturyhmien tai -lajien välillä samalla alueella. Sorsien keskimääräinen metsästysaika oli 164 vrk, mikä merkitsi 11 vrk:n lyhennystä vuodesta 1966.

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