

Oct 31, 1933

Mr. John A. Burriess,  
Guthrie Center, Iowa

Dear Mr. Burriess:

I am in receipt of your letter of inquiry relative to duck nesting environment. In answer to your questions I might make a few general statements to the effect that the type of environment which you describe along the river near Eldon should have possibilities as breeding grounds for such ducks as mallards. Marshes grown up to dense, or fairly dense, vegetation, surrounded by relatively undisturbed weedy, or grassy growths for a distance of 100 yards or so, constitute superior breeding ground, deep water lakes generally are not of particular utility to the ducks from this standpoint, although they may be valuable as resting quarters during the hunting season. Deep water lakes ordinarily lack proper rearing cover (cover suitable as hiding places for ducklings) without which any breeding ground is sadly deficient. Land surrounding many marshes, on the other hand, is often pastured or cultivated to the water's edge, and hence is of trifling value as nesting grounds. Functional water-fowl environment must contain territory of both types.

In answer to some of your specific questions: A depth of water in marshes of six inches to two feet is most desirable, provided that this may be maintained at a fairly constant level; fluctuations of a few inches ordinarily do not make any particular difference but the marsh cannot go dry at the time when the young ducklings are helpless and unable to move to other rearing grounds. Ducks do not have to nest near the water, although a margin of weedy vegetation and the like for a distance of 100 yards, or ~~more~~, is highly desirable. The nesting season begins about the first of May and is largely concluded by the latter part of June. There is, of course, a certain danger that nests located near water may be flooded out by a rise, but I do not know what can be done to correct that except by providing sufficient environment so that the birds have a wide choice of nesting sites. It is extremely doubtful if any species of wholly wild ducks raise more than one brood in the season, although most will make a limited number of early attempts at re-nesting if the first



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nests are lost from some cause.

I am spending a considerable amount of my time in the vicinity of Ottumwa, and have recently done some work along the river bottom near Eldon so I have more or less freshly in mind the sort of country to which I suppose you refer. I will probably be back in Ottumwa in about a week so if you happen to be around I might talk this over with you personally. You can learn by getting in touch with Dr. Boone whether or not I am in town.

Very truly yours,

PLE:BB

Paul L. Errington,  
Asst. Prof., In Charge  
Wild Life Project

Dictated October 26, 1953