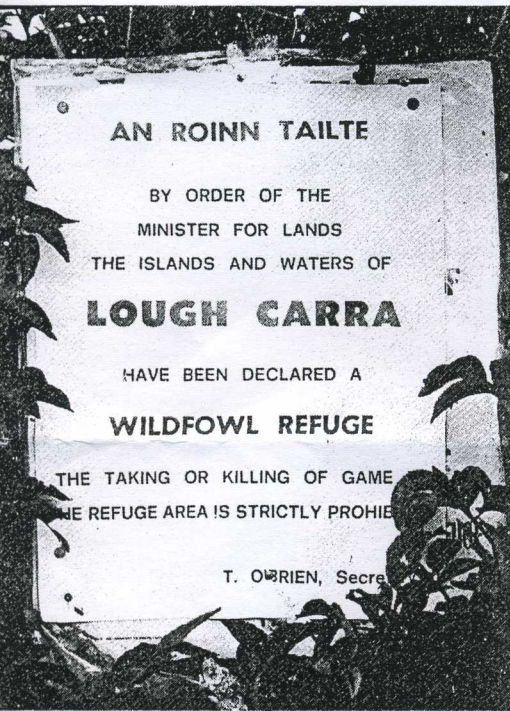


Duck traps are visited daily.

Lough Carra has recently been declared a reserve.



# WILDFOWL ON LOUGH CARRA

by Jeffery Harrison

Lough Carra in Co. Mayo, Eire, apart from being one of the most beautiful loughs in all Eire—some would say the most beautiful of all—will soon be no less famous for the wildfowl research being carried out there.

Lough Carra has recently been declared a Wildfowl Refuge. It has the largest concentration of nesting mallard anywhere in the Republic—that is why Brian Stronach chose this lough as the site for his studies when he began his wildfowl research following his appointment by the Ministry of Lands just over two years ago, prior to which he had been a game warden in East Africa.

During this time, regular wildfowl counts have been carried out, weekly in winter, every two weeks in summer. This is no mean undertaking as we were to discover, for the lough is eight miles long and covers over 4,000 acres. The count involves travelling some 24 miles in an open boat and takes almost five hours. Fortunately Brian has two real enthusiasts as his assistants, Tommy Flanelly and Joe Conroy, each an expert wildfowler and fisherman from boyhood—and what better upbringing can there be for wildfowl conservation?

Peak duck counts on the lough so far have been as follows: mallard, 1,600; teal, 880; pochard, 700; tufted duck, 550; wigeon, 125; shoveler, 100; goldeneye, 100; gadwall, 45. Both greylags and Greenland white-fronted geese roost on the water.

The breeding population of the Lough is very accurately plotted and consists of some 150 pairs of mallard, 50 pairs of tufted, 10 pairs of teal and 20 pairs of red-breasted mergansers.

What makes this reserve particularly interesting is that virtually the whole of this population breeds on the islands of

which there are over 60 in all, mostly with plenty of nesting cover from bushes and trees. Some indeed may have too much cover, but Brian's studies will in time reveal the ideal type of island, which will enable them and the thousands of other islands in the Irish loughs to be properly managed for nesting wildfowl.

The reason why the islands on Carra are so favoured by nesting duck is probably the result of pressure from ground predators ashore, which is to say foxes and feral cats. Now, on the islands, only otters remain as a ground predator and they do little damage. The same of course applies ashore to the very rare pine marten.

The major predator is the hooded crow. In the wonderful summer of 1968, the breeding success rate was only 38 per cent

Tommy (left) and Joe recording a mallard's weight.



