

Journal Sept 22-1941

PROTECT OUR LARGEST MIGRATORY BIRD

by

William L. Finley and Ed F. Averill

Picture to yourself a small family of great white birds -- the largest migratory species in the country -- trying to carry on like refugees of a stricken race on a hidden lake in the depths of a wooded region. It is a beautiful home site surrounded by wet mountain meadows, eternal quiet except for the talkings of the birds, the occasional chatter of a squirrel, or the windy creakings of a tall tree leaning against another. And the two big trumpeter swans (*Olor buccinator*) are quiet, too, because of the twin half-grown cygnets swimming about and feeding all unknowing of the dangers that may come into their lives later on.

Extirminated by gun-fire! This at least was the consensus of opinion years ago by those who watched the great white flocks diminish to a dangerous remnant. We know that trumpeter was the bird of the wide interior, ranging between Hudson Bay and the Rocky Mountains, and breeding chiefly in a northern range. Further south, the breeding of the bird was more or less desultory, but there were records from Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Idaho, and Washington. It was formerly abundant along the Columbia River. The bird was slaughtered in immense numbers by hunters of the Hudson Bay Company, and the slaughter stopped only when the species ceased to be productive.

But where there is life, there is hope. And so it has come about with rigid protection and watchfulness, along with an awakened moral conscience, that the trumpeter is at least holding his own in the United States. At least 211 of these birds are found today on Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Montana, Yellowstone National Park, and the surrounding areas. Last year 190 of the birds were reported. In 1934 there were only 33 known trumpeters in the country.

This swan no longer takes long migrations as in its early history. The late Joseph Grinnell stated that the trumpeter was once a regular spring visitant to the fresh water ponds and lakes in the vicinity of Los Angeles, California. Its recent movements have been confined mostly between Yellowstone and Red Rock Lakes. This takes in local migrations which during the winter months may take

the birds a distance of as much as 300 miles from their summer feeding and nesting areas.

Mr. David D. Condon, Assistant Yellowstone Park Naturalist, who is probably closer to the intimate life of this bird and knows more about him than anyone else, has given us some first-hand information. On April 17, 1937, he saw five trumpeters that had wandered down to a slough of Marsh Creek, a tributary of the Portneuf River thirty miles south of Pocatello, Idaho. The day after, while crossing from Lorenzo to Roberts, Idaho, he watched a pair of trumpeters for some time on an ox bow lake in the Snake River bottoms.

The swan travel from their wintering grounds in the early spring back to the regions where they are apt to nest the coming season, and in many instances arrive before the ice has left the lakes. Observations also show that some of them stay around open water spaces close to their nesting lakes and move in as early as possible in the spring.

The swan sometimes move in mid-nesting season from one lake to another. In one case this occurred in early August when their lake was taken over by a family of otters, two adults and three young. Soon after this the swan tired of the otters' companionship and moved to an area where such undesired associations were not so numerous. These birds were distinctively marked by rusty heads and necks, the only ones in the Park so observed. Another pair of birds established their nest on the Crescent Hill Beaver Ponds and after twenty days of incubation it was destroyed by a black bear on June 5. The swan left the vicinity. The coyote is another ever present fear of the birds, especially in early spring when there is snow on the ground.

With the approach of the fall, there is a local migration of non-nesting birds from their summer places to the shallower water regions of Lake Yellowstone. The first ones usually arrive there about September 1, and from then on there is an ever increasing number. Most nesting families are in flight and ready for fall migration by October 1. In Idaho trumpeters utilize the sloughs of the Snake River Valley, Teton Basin, Henry's Fork, Buffalo Park, Warm River, and other tributaries of the Snake as wintering places.

There is a definite mortality among the swan due to the shooting by hunters during the open season on waterfowl. In Idaho they have been permitted to shoot snow geese and some hunters have been careless in distinguishing swan from geese. Last year it is known that seven swan were killed on Henry's Fork of the Snake River, two in Swan Valley, and three on Mud Lake west of St. Anthony. It is fortunate that at the suggestion of the Fish and Wildlife Service it is now illegal in Idaho to shoot either white geese or swans. Undoubtedly many swans were shot that no one knew about for they were either left where killed or if wounded they flew off to die in some out-of-the-way place and were not found. Swan also die of lead poisoning from their habit of feeding deep on the water bottoms of former shooting grounds where they pick up shot mistaken for gravel.

The trumpeter and whistling swans are almost identical except for size, wing spread, and one or two minute markings. The whistler is four and a half feet in length with a wing spread of seven feet, and has a distinguishing yellow spot on the black lores which the trumpeter lacks. The trumpeter is five and a half feet in length with a wing spread of sometimes more than eight feet. The nesting habits are the same. The nest is made of coarse grass, leaves and feathers, with five to seven dull white eggs, placed on the ground, preferably on an island in deep water for protection from enemies. One writer has described the calls of the two swans in this fashion. "The trumpeter blows an authentic stentoraceous trombone, while the whistler's instrument is a high-pitched toy trumpet in comparison."



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1941.

RARE TRUMPETER SWANS ARE HOLDING THEIR OWN, SHOW SLIGHT INCREASE

The rare trumpeter swan, which is on the verge of extinction, apparently is holding its own in the United States, a joint report of the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes revealed today.

At least 211 of these huge birds are found on the Red Rock Lakes, National Wildlife Refuge, Mont., Yellowstone National Park, Wyo., and the surrounding area. Last year 190 of these birds were reported.

The count was conducted cooperatively by personnel of the two Services.

In addition to the small flock in the Red Rock Lakes-Yellowstone region, another group of trumpeters is being protected in Canada.

Officially classified as the largest migratory waterfowl in North America, the trumpeter no longer migrates over long distances. Until recently, movements of the United States flock were generally confined between the refuge and the park.

This year adults and cygnets were found for the first time on Hebgen Lake, which lies between the two Department of Interior sanctuaries.

Once an abundant bird, the trumpeter swan population declined so rapidly that during the early part of the century the species was thought to be extinct. Then a small flock was discovered in the Yellowstone Park region and efforts were begun to restore the species.

This year's count showed a total of 142 adults and 69 cygnets (young), while last year there were 122 adults and 68 cygnets.

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A breakdown of the present flocks show there were 96 trumpeters on the
26-1+ Red Rock Lakes Refuge (52 adults, 44 cygnets), 59 on Yellowstone Park (44
29- adults, 15 cygnets), 51 on surrounding lands (41 adults, 10 cygnets),
2 adults transferred to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Oreg., and 3
adults transferred to the National Elk Refuge, Wyo.

Trumpeter swan populations since annual counts have been made are as follows: 33 (1934); 73 (1935); 114 (1936); 168 (1937); 148 (1938); 199 (1939); 190 (1940); and 211 (1941).

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