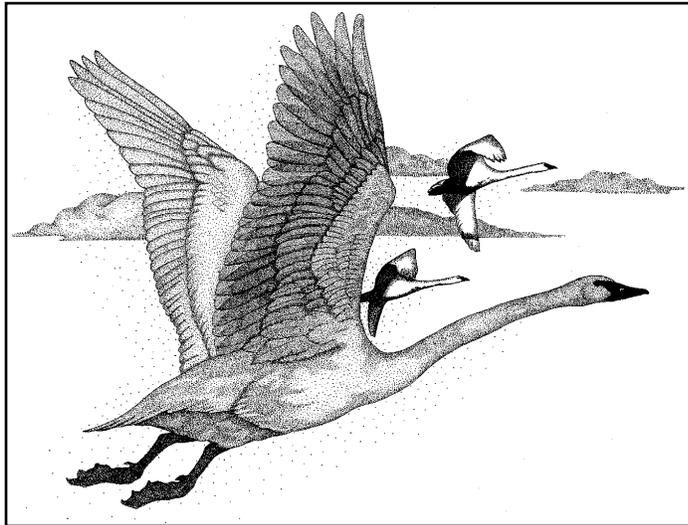


Ohio Division of Wildlife

Life History Notes

Trumpeter Swan

Scientific Name: *Cygnus buccinator*



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Introduction

Great numbers of trumpeter swans once inhabited lakes and marshes throughout much of Canada and the northern United States. In the Ohio Territory, accounts by French missionaries describe trumpeters nesting in the marshes along the Detroit River and at the entrance to Lake Erie. Trumpeters most likely nested in the adjacent southwestern Lake Erie marsh region as well, but were not documented because it was so difficult for humans to penetrate this area, then covered by the Great Black Swamp. Archeological evidence shows trumpeter swans once inhabited several regions of Ohio.

Trumpeter swans were killed for food and skins, first by Indians and then by white men upon arrival on the continent. Swan skins were sold and used to make powder puffs in the flourishing wildlife trade in Europe. Feathers were used to adorn fashionable clothing and to make writing pens. The plumage trade peaked in the early 1800s and swan populations were dramatically reduced by the mid-1800s. Loss of habitat for this wetland-dependent species resulted in further declines. By 1900, trumpeter swans were extirpated from nearly all their breeding range, except for a few remote areas of Alaska and the western United States.

Passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by Congress in 1918 provided protection for swans in the U. S. Despite this measure, by 1932 only 69 trumpeter swans were known to exist in the lower 48 states. This remnant population got its first boost in 1935 when the U. S. government established the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife

Refuge in Montana. This refuge protected the population that existed in the remote mountain valleys where the states of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming meet.

Trumpeter swan restoration and management programs that began in the mid-1900s in the U. S. and Canada gradually boosted trumpeter swan populations. In 1996, Ohio became one of a number of states involved in reintroduction plans to restore trumpeter swans to the Midwest.

Description

The trumpeter swan is one of eight swan species, the largest swan in the world and the largest species of waterfowl native to North America. It is one of only two swan species that are native to North America. The other is the Tundra swan. The mute swan is also found throughout North America, but is an introduced species that came from Europe.

Trumpeter swans measure up to four feet in height with a wingspan of seven to eight feet. They weigh 20 to 30 pounds; the male averages 27 pounds and the female 22 pounds.

The adult trumpeter has snow white plumage with a black bill and feet; a young bird or cygnet is a sooty gray color with pinkish colored bill and feet. The neck and head feathers of an adult may be stained a rusty color from feeding in water that contains iron. The bill of a trumpeter swan may also have a red border on the lower jaw that gives the bird the appearance of wearing lipstick.

The long neck of the trumpeter swan is an adaptation that allows the bird to access food

inaccessible to other species of waterfowl. The trumpeter can uproot plants in four feet of water.

The trumpeter derives its name from its call, described as resonant, deep, loud, and trumpet-like, resembling the notes of a French horn. The trumpeter swan has a life span of 20 to 30 years.

Historically, trumpeter swans had a breeding range that ran from the southern half of Alaska, south and east through Canada and into the northern half of the continental U. S. including Washington and Oregon, the Plains and Midwest states, south through the northeast half of Arkansas and the western portions of Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky, and finally east through Ohio, northern West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York to New England and the Atlantic Coast. Swans then wintered in the southern half of the continental United States.

The breeding and wintering ranges for the interior population of trumpeter swans, including those being reintroduced into Ohio, are smaller pockets and still being defined. Refer to the map for details of the breeding and wintering range of interior trumpeters.

Habitat and Habits

Trumpeter swans prefer large marshes and lakes ranging in size from 40 to 150 acres. They like shallow wetlands one to three feet deep with a diverse mix of plenty of emergent and submergent vegetation and open water. The bulk of their diet consists of arrowhead, sago pondweed, wild celery tubers and the stems and leaves of waterweed, pondweeds, water milfoil, white water buttercup, muskgrass, burreed, and duckreed. They feed occasionally on freshwater invertebrates, snails, worms, seeds, and grain. Adult swans primarily feed in shallow water using their long necks to reach their food, but can also tip-up like dabbling ducks to feed in water four feet deep.

Reproduction and Care of the Young

Trumpeter swans are monogamous, forming pair bonds at their wintering grounds. Pairs typically begin nesting at four to six years of age and often select a nesting area near where the female, called a pen, hatched or fledged.

Trumpeter swans are usually the first waterfowl to appear on breeding grounds, arriving barely after the ice melts in the spring. They begin courtship behavior at this point. Courtship behavior includes bobbing their heads and quivering their wings while facing each other.

Nest building usually begins in April and may take up to two weeks to complete. The nest may be as large as six feet or more in diameter. Swans often build a nest on top of muskrat

lodges or in stands of emergent vegetation, such as bulrushes, cattails or sedges where the water is one to three feet deep. They frequently use the same nest structure from year to year.

The pen usually begins laying eggs in late April. She will lay one off-white egg every other day until the clutch of four to six eggs is complete. The average clutch is five eggs. The eggs are about 4.5 inches long and three inches wide. The incubation period lasts 33 to 37 days. If she leaves the nest to feed, bathe or preen, the female will cover the eggs with nest material. The male or cob, does not share incubation duties with the pen, but will guard the nest vigorously, chasing away any intruders. Trumpeter swans are very territorial birds and will boldly defend mating, nesting, and cygnet feeding areas from other large birds including other swans, Canada geese, and herons.

Cygnets hatch in June and weigh about seven ounces. They take to the water after only a day or two and feed in shallow water areas on aquatic insects, crustaceans, and vegetation.

Cygnets remain with their parents through the summer and migrate with them to wintering grounds in October or November. They migrate with their parents back to summer grounds in the spring, but are then chased away by the adults. They remain in sibling groups until they are about two years old and then they begin to seek their own mates.

Management Plans

In May 1996, the Ohio Division of Wildlife released trumpeter swans on the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area in Ottawa County. It was the first release at one of 11 sites selected for this 10-year project. About 150 trumpeter swans were released as part of this reintroduction effort.

The Division of Wildlife, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, the Wilds, and Ducks Unlimited joined in the reintroduction program to restore this swan to the state. These magnificent waterfowl will add to the diversity of wildlife in Ohio and enhance wildlife viewing opportunities on state wetlands.

Young swans were acquired from zoos and aviculturists and cared for at the Wilds, a wildlife preservation center in Muskingum County. The swans were released on selected sites when they reached about two years of age. In addition to acquiring young swans, the Division collected eggs from trumpeter swan nests in Alaska from 1996 through 1998. The eggs were hatched at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo where the young were cared for until about three months of age. These Ohio-hatched cygnets then join the other young swans reared at the Wilds until they are ready for release, in groups of 10 to 15.

Only high quality wetlands are chosen as release sites, taking into account the area's

wildlife viewing potential and quality wetland acreage. Many of the wetlands at the release sites were created as a result of restoration work the Division has completed through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). The NAWMP includes a series of initiatives to restore, protect, and enhance wetland habitat and these areas are providing prime habitat and diverse vegetative content that make them excellent release sites for trumpeter swan reintroduction. Wetland restoration has been undertaken by the Division in cooperation with many conservation organizations and private partners.

Viewing Opportunities

Currently, trumpeter swans can be seen throughout the state on various state wildlife areas and private wetlands. Swans were released at these wildlife areas: Magee Marsh in Ottawa County, Mallard Club in Lucas County, Pickerel Creek in Sandusky County, Mosquito Creek and Grand River in Trumbull County, Killbuck Marsh in Wayne County, and Killdeer Plains in Wyandot County. In cooperation with Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, five trumpeters were also released at Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge. Trumpeter swans can also be seen at two other locations: The Wilds and the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo.

Note: Trumpeter swans are very territorial during nesting and rearing periods, often remaining that way until the young are a half year old. They can easily knock down a human being with their large, strong wings or break the skin with their bite. Observers should keep a good distance when viewing these swans and should not approach a nest, adult swans, or cygnets.

Do Something Wild!

The trumpeter swan is among the majority of wildlife species in Ohio that are not hunted. All of these animals are vital parts of our overall ecosystem and contribute to the wildlife diversity in the state. Helping us manage and research these species are the generous citizens of the state of Ohio. With money they either donated through the state income tax check-off, by the purchase of a wildlife license plate, or their direct contribution to the Endangered Species Special Account, the Division is able to purchase critical habitat essential to sustaining many species of wildlife and to implement programs such as the reintroduction of the trumpeter swan to Ohio.

Contributions to our Wildlife Diversity Program are accepted throughout the year. To make a donation, please send a check to: Endangered Species Special Account, Ohio Division of Wildlife, 2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G, Columbus, Ohio 43229-6693. All contributions, whether made on your income tax return or directly, are tax deductible.

At a Glance

Mating: Monogamous

Peak Breeding Activity: April

Incubation: 33-37 days

Young Hatch: June

Clutch Size: 5-9 eggs; 5 is average.

Young Leave Parents: At one year.

Number of Broods per Year: 1

Adult Weight: 20-30 pounds

Adult Wingspan: 7 foot

Adult Height: 4 feet

Life Expectancy: 20-30 years

Migration Pattern: Year- round resident

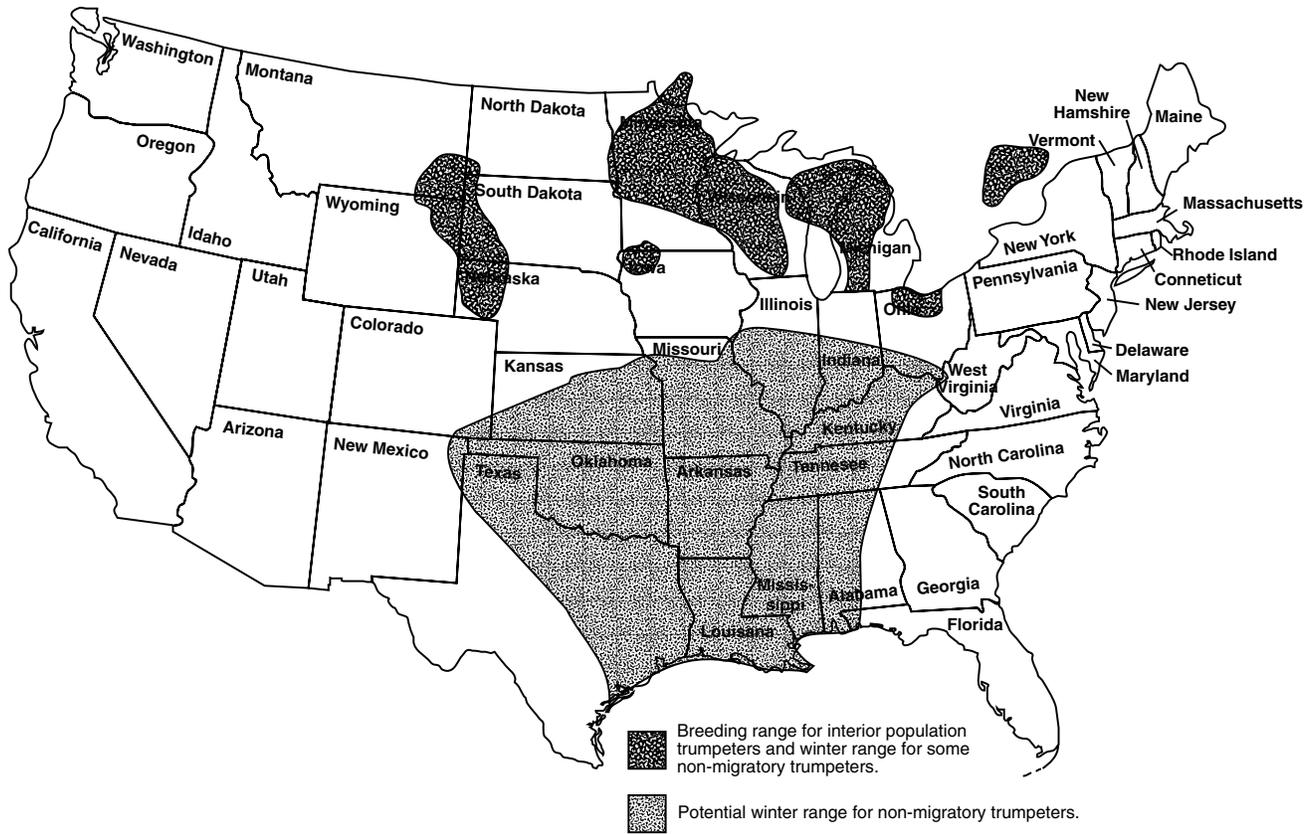
Typical Foods: Tubers and leaves of submergent and emergent aquatic vegetation

Native to Ohio: Yes

Active or Potential Nuisance Species: No

The trumpeter swan is a state endangered species. It is not listed as federally endangered or threatened, but is protected from hunting.

Breeding and Winter Range for Trumpeters



Ted Strickland, Governor / Sean D. Logan, Director / David M. Graham, Chief
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