



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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RARE TRUMPETER SWANS OBSERVED IN ALASKA

The rare trumpeter swan is appearing in southeastern Alaska in growing numbers in both winter and summer, according to reports sent in by observers of the Fish and Wildlife Service to Director Albert M. Day.

It is quite possible, say Service officials, that many of these great birds are an overflow from the adjacent Canadian flocks known to winter along the coast of British Columbia.

Service personnel believe that trumpeters may now be breeding in Alaska. In addition to the wintering flocks totaling nearly 300, reports have come in of birds summering on the small lakes among the islands, and on several occasions the young have been observed.

Service personnel recently completed a survey of trumpeters wintering in the Ketchikan district and reported that an estimated number of 200 were observed in Barnes and Sweet Lakes. A number of others were found on Thorne Lake and River, on Klawock Lake, on Cleveland Peninsula, and on Revilla Island.

In 1947 the trumpeter swan population in the states was 350.

In early times the trumpeter swan probably bred from southern Alaska and Canada as far south as Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Montana, and Idaho. Even as late as 1871 it raised young in Iowa, and in 1886 in Minnesota. Since the turn of the century its breeding grounds in this country have been confined entirely to the region about northwestern Wyoming and southwestern Montana.

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. Early destruction resulted primarily from the heavy trading in the bird's down and breast skin. Later the population was further depleted when the breeding grounds of the swans were taken over for farms and ranches.

In 1907, when a small flock was discovered in the Red Rock Lakes and Yellowstone Park region, efforts were begun by the Federal Government to restore the species. In 1935 the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Montana, which now comprises 32,000 acres, was established primarily for the protection and perpetuation of the trumpeter swan.

In 1939 when the Red Rock Lakes area had apparently reached its population limits for trumpeters, the Service selected the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County, Oregon, and the National Elk Refuge in Teton County, Wyoming, as areas to which young cygnets, captured on the Red Rock Lakes refuge, were transplanted for the purpose of starting new nesting grounds where the habitat factors were favorable.

Nesting occurred on the National Elk refuge in both 1944 and 1945. So far no nesting has been noted on the Malheur Refuge. In a new attempt to spread their breeding range in congenial areas, the Service transferred four 3-year old birds and eight 2-year olds from the Malheur refuge to the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada in 1947.

Each year in August, following the breeding season, personnel of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service cooperate in making a census of the birds found on the Red Rock Lakes refuge, Yellowstone National Park, and the adjacent nesting areas. The following figures show the slow build-up which has occurred in trumpeter swan numbers in this country: 73 in 1935, 114 in 1936, 168 in 1937, 148 in 1938, 199 in 1939, 185 in 1940, 211 in 1941, 199 in 1942, 221 in 1943, 283 in 1944, 301 in 1945, 361 in 1946, and 350 in 1947.

To prevent the species from being entirely exterminated, complete protection has been given to trumpeter swans in the United States since 1924. The Fish and Wildlife Service does not even issue Federal permits for taking trumpeters or their eggs for scientific purposes.

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