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FLUOROSCOPIC STUDY SHOWS TRUMPETER SWAN SUBJECT TO HUNTING PRESSURE

The trumpeter swan, one of America's rare and endangered species, is being subjected to moderately heavy hunting pressure, a fluoroscopic study of 100 birds on the Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Montana indicates, John L. Farley, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, said today.

The fluoroscopic study showed that 13 out of the 100 swans were carrying lead pellets in their tissues, despite the fact that the trumpeter is on the totally protected list.

The pressure is probably due to mistaking the trumpeter swan for the snow goose or some other species and not because of deliberate hunting, Service officials believe. Now that hunting pressure has been definitely established, however, Fish and Wildlife Service officials will attempt to devise methods for assuring the birds greater protection on their wintering grounds.

The study, a cooperative fluoroscoping project inaugurated by the Fish and Wildlife Service, was supervised by the Illinois Natural History Survey, a research agency which has done extensive fluoroscoping of waterfowl in the Mississippi Valley. As a result of these studies the Illinois agency has determined that there is a relationship between the number of lead pellets found in the tissues of live birds and the hunting pressures to which the birds have been subjected.

Fish and Wildlife Service officials know that occasionally a trumpeter swan is killed unintentionally or mistaken for another species of waterfowl and shot, even though the bird should be readily identified by its seven foot wing spread and because it is much larger than any other bird in its range. Service officials know also that the normal winter range of the trumpeters outside the refuges crosses areas where ducks and geese are being legally hunted and that there is opportunity for the big birds to get shot accidentally. It was to measure this hunting pressure that the fluoroscoping project was initiated.

During the summer months the swans are moulting and thus are flightless because of the loss of their primary wing feathers. Capture of the birds is relatively easy for refuge personnel using air-thrust boats. The work is being conducted on a limited portion of the refuge where there is no interference with the broods.

Red Rock Lakes Refuge is the home of the American flock of trumpeters which fluctuates in size but approximates 600 birds. The birds have a usual range of about 100 miles from the refuge--notably in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and adjacent National Forests--but banding results have proved that there is some interchange of birds between the Canadian and American flocks. The Canadian flock is "at home" about 850 miles north of Red Rock Lakes.

In recent years another breeding flock of trumpeter swans was discovered in the Copper River country of Alaska.

The normal range of the American trumpeter is in a wild and sparsely settled portion of this country and any migration is over an equally wild area, making enforcement of migratory bird legislation for the trumpeter difficult.

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