

The Trumpeter Swan

By MARGARET BELCHER, REGINA

One of the things that attracts "birders" to the Cypress Hills is the expectation of seeing a pair of the world's largest swans, the Trumpeters. Only about 1,300 of these rare native swans exist today in North America. They are to be found in small flocks or as individual pairs in Alaska, British Columbia, Alberta, and in the states south of the border. Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Montana 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 returns 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 has been discovered along the Copper River in Alaska (*Auk*, 1957, 74:92). The only flock left in British Columbia seems to be the one at Lonesome Lake, 300 miles northwest of Vancouver, pictured in the *Leader-Post* of April 1, 1957.

I have seen Trumpeter Swans only once—a pair in the Wildfowl Trust's sanctuary at Slimbridge, Gloucestershire. These swans were placed in the Trust's care by the Queen to whom they were presented by the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia during the Royal Tour in 1952. It seemed strange to see the first pair of Trumpeters so far away from

home, when a pair have nested several years in Saskatchewan in the West Block of the Cypress Hills.

In 1953 the first Museum nest record for the Trumpeter in Saskatchewan was established (*Blue Jay*, 1953, 11:4:26-27). However, residents of the area had noticed the birds in previous years at Bottley's Lake where they nest, and at Adams' Lake and Harris' Lake to which they move their young (see item by Percy Drury of Swift Current in *Blue Jay*, 1954, 12:2:11).

According to Taverner, the Trumpeter was at one time a regular sight throughout the prairies and British Columbia. Perhaps its disappearance is accounted for largely by the fact that it was easily shot. Although one of America's endangered species, the Trumpeter is still being subjected to hunting pressure. This is shown by a fluoroscopic study of birds carried out in 1956 in the Red Rock Lakes Refuge. During the summer moult, flightless swans were caught by refuge personnel using thrust boats in a part of the refuge where no broods would be disturbed. Thirteen out of 100 swans carried lead pellets in their tissue, despite the fact that the Trumpeter is on the fully protected list. This is probably due to the Trumpeter's being mistaken for the Snow Goose, a protected species. In any case, the proof of hunting pressure emphasizes again the need for untiring effort ensuring the protection, through education and legislation, of rare birds like the Trumpeter Swan and the Whooping Crane.

BIRD NOTES

EVIDENCE OF STRATEGY IN THE HUNTING OF THE SNOWY OWL: One morning while going out to do chores, I noticed a Snowy Owl perched on the combine. As there was a flock of partridge in the trees nearby, I imagined he had tried to catch one and failed, so was waiting for another chance. As I was going into the barn, a few pigeons flew out,

and the owl immediately gave chase but of course the pigeons had the difficulty of keeping out of his reach. After a few circles around the barn the owl gave up and glided to a telephone pole, 30 rods east of the barn, and soon the pigeons settled down on the east slope of a grassy roof, in full view of the owl.

About 20 minutes later