

TRUMPETER SWANS IN EASTERN SASKATCHEWAN

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In early November 1987, I was getting a haircut in Porcupine Plain and talking to Frank, the barber, about doing a study on the migratory waterfowl at Marean Lake in Greenwater Provincial Park. The usual number of old timers were in the barber shop visiting and listening to whatever conversation came up. When I mentioned the birds on Marean Lake, LeRoy Le-Grande spoke up. (Roy, as he is usually called, is a tall gentleman with a crooked stemmed pipe in the corner of his mouth, who can tell you about many exciting adventures that he experienced while freighting in the north.)

“Did you see the Trumpeter Swans on Marean Lake?” he said.

“Trumpeter Swans?” I asked.

Roy replied, “I canoe on the lake in August and have seen two to four birds both this summer and last.”

“Roy,” I said, “Swans are not supposed to be here in the summer. The Tundra Swan nests in the Arctic and Trumpeters are western birds. The large white birds that you are seeing must be pelicans.”

Roy became quite disturbed and, with eyes snapping, said emphatically, “I know a swan when I see one.”

I immediately dropped the subject, but in 1989 I apologized to Roy when I found that he was right, for on 29 June I saw a pair of swans on Marean Lake and they were definitely Trumpeters. Upon viewing them at close range with a 32x spotting scope I could see that there was no yellow on the bills between the nostrils and the eyes (this is also missing on some

Tundras) and the longer straight bills covered a considerable portion of the sides of their faces; this with the flattened crowns on their heads gave them much longer and narrower white foreheads than those of Tundra Swans.

On 28 May 1989, Michael Crawford photographed a pair of Trumpeter Swans just south of Greenwater Provincial Park. The pictures were sent to Paul James and Bob Kreba of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History in Regina and to Henri Ouellet of the National Museum in Ottawa. It was confirmed that they had been properly identified. A pair of swans that I photographed on Greenwater Lake, 8 May 1990, were also verified as Trumpeters from a picture that I sent to James and Kreba.

The Trumpeter Swan was once common in western and central North America and formerly nested in Canada at least as far east as Norway House, Manitoba.² During the 1800s they were nearly exterminated by the commercial plumage trade, hunting and habitat destruction. Between 1823 and 1880, about 108,000 swan skins were sold by the Hudson's Bay Company in London, and, for the oologist, Trumpeter eggs sold for a higher price than those of Whooping Cranes. It seemed by the early 1900s that the Trumpeter Swan was doomed to extinction for it had disappeared from much of its former breeding range.³

When protection was legislated for the non-migrating flock in Yellowstone, Wyoming, and Red Rock Lakes, Montana, it was thought that they included most of the world's Trumpeter Swans. However, in 1954, it was discovered that about 3,000 birds that were formerly thought to be



Trumpeter Swans at Greenwater Lake

Donald F. Hooper

Tundra Swans nested in southern Alaska. Upon finding the Alaska flock the Trumpeter was taken off the endangered list.³

With the protection of the Tri-state flock in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho,³ and a closed hunting season on both species of native swans which became effective in 1918,¹⁰ the Trumpeter Swan has gradually made a comeback over part of its former range. They nest in Canada in the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan,^{1,7,9} at Grand Prairie³ and Elk Island National Park (introduced),⁴ Alberta, Toobally Lakes in British Columbia and Yukon,³ and Nahanni in the Northwest Territories.⁴ Some birds were released by the Delta Research Station in Manitoba in 1971, but it is not certain whether they have reproduced in this area.⁶ There are successfully introduced flocks in the United States in Oregon, Nevada, South Dakota, and Minnesota.³

Trumpeter Swans were reported nesting at Manning, Alberta, in 1986, and there are confirmed sightings for Lac des Isles, Saskatchewan, in June 1988, and Lynn Lake and Leaf Rapids in Manitoba, also in 1988.⁶ In the light of this information one must not take it for granted that all swans seen in eastern Saskatchewan are Tundras. Swans seen between June 10 and August 49(2). June 1991

31 should be checked to see if they are Trumpeters. An injured Tundra Swan can remain for the summer instead of going to the Arctic and there is the very unusual situation of a pair of Tundra Swans nesting in the parklands near North Battleford from 1973 to 1981.⁸

It was reported that 14 Trumpeter Swans were seen at Veillardville near Hudson Bay on 21 April 1987, but the pictures that were taken were sent to Paul James and Bob Kreba who identified them as Tundra Swans. There are unconfirmed reports of Trumpeter Swans from Mirond Lake, Pelican Narrows, Stony Rapids, Montreal Lake, Torch and Fond du Lac Rivers from 1985 to 1988.⁶

Probable records of Trumpeter Swans in the vicinity of Greenwater Provincial Park:

1. Several swans were seen by Mac Chimko and Louis Currey at Bjork Lake, 17 km north of the park, in July in the early 1970s.
2. One swan stayed at a small lake north of the park in June the early 1970s, and was seen by Joe Genaille.
3. Two to four were seen by LeRoy LeGrande at Marean Lake in August 1986 and 1987.

4. Pair of Trumpeter Swans was seen at Mystrey Lake just south of the park on 28 May 1989. One bird was heard to trumpet loudly and the identity was verified from pictures taken by Michael Crawford.

5. Pair of Trumpeter Swans seen at close range at Marean Lake by Donald Hooper on 27 June 1989. This pair was seen again on 29 June by Carl and Joyce Mohr.

6. Pair of swans seen occasionally in the summer of 1989 by Leona Seafoot at a small lake just north of the park.

7. Pair of Trumpeter Swans was seen on Greenwater Lake by Herman and Irma Doerksen and G. and P. Brozoski on 7 October 1989. The swans were observed at close range from canoes, and one was heard to trumpet loudly.

8. On 5 May 1990, a pair of Trumpeter Swans was seen on Greenwater Lake by Ronald Hooper. One was heard to trumpet loudly. On 8 May, they were seen again in the same locality by Donald Hooper and Les Baker. One bird trumpeted so loudly that it sounded like a horn on a truck. We later checked with a tape on bird songs and we both agreed that this could be none other than the call of the Trumpeter Swan. A picture was taken by Donald Hooper and identification was verified.

9. A pair of swans was seen on Greenwater Lake by John Woulfe in late May 1990.

10. One swan was seen at a farm dugout south of the park by Leonard Teale, in late June 1990.

11. Dave Harvey saw Trumpeter Swan on Marean Lake on 26 June 1990.

12. Pair of Trumpeter Swans was seen on a small marshy lake in the park by Donald Hooper and Rhys Beaulieu on 11 July 1990. The marsh was checked by canoe but there was no brood.

Probable records of Trumpeter Swans seen in other parts of Eastern Saskatchewan:

1. One Trumpeter Swan was photographed by Wayne Harris at Squaw Rapids on 24 December 1985.

2. Twelve swans were seen by Ronald Hooper on Echo Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley on 28 October 1988. There were several grey young with them. One adult trumpeted loudly. An immature bird was seen by Ronald in the same locality on 26 November 1988. The pinkish bill was black at the base which shows that it was definitely a Trumpeter Swan.

3. One pair seen at Valeport by Bob Luterbach in early June 1990. One trumpeted loudly, definitely the call of the Trumpeter Swan.

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