



Trumpeter Swans, Wye Marsh.
Courtesy of Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre

Recent history of Trumpeter Swans in Ontario and Quebec and their status in 2010-2011

Harry Lumsden, Raymond Kingdon, Beverly Kingdon, Kyna Intini and Julie Kee

Introduction

EVERY FIVE YEARS, resource agencies across North America cooperate in a continent-wide inventory of Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*). In 2010, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), Conservation Authorities, staff from Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre and volunteers of the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Team contributed data from Ontario. The purpose of this paper is to put on record recent observations of

Trumpeter Swans in Ontario and Quebec and the results of the inventory.

The history of Trumpeter Swans in Ontario is an interrupted one. The original breeding population was extirpated probably in the late 18th or early 19th century. The species survived only in western Canada and the western United States. The last known migrant in Ontario was shot in 1886 at Long Point (42° 34' N 080° 15' W) on Lake Erie (Lumsden 1984). In the 1980s, Trumpeter Swans started to appear in northwestern Ontario. These originated from restoration programs in the mid-western United States. Minnesota's Hennepin Parks program started in 1979, followed by their Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) program in 1982, the Michigan DNR program in 1982, the Wisconsin DNR program in 1987, and the Iowa DNR program in 1995. Ontario started restoration in the southern part of the province in 1982 and finished in 2006.

Methods

In northwestern Ontario, MNR field crews flew summer helicopter surveys over areas where breeding swans had been documented in the past. In eastern Ontario, the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority conducted the same kind of aerial surveys.

The southern Ontario population of swans now breed in an extensive area from Lake Erie north into the edge of the boreal forest. Resources are lacking to survey these breeding grounds comprehensively. This stock of swans winters

mostly in restricted areas north and south of Lake Ontario.

All released swans and those wild-hatched birds which we could catch were marked with yellow patagial tags with a black three digit inscription. In 2009, we used ratios of tagged to untagged birds to estimate total numbers of swans (Lumsden 2010). This gave an erroneous result because of the difficulty of detecting all those which had lost their tags but still carried their leg bands. We abandoned this technique in 2010, when we used the number of swans that

Table 1: Results of aerial surveys of Trumpeter Swans in eight Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Districts in Northwestern and one in Eastern Ontario in 2010.

NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO POPULATION	WHITE SWANS*	CYGNETS	TOTAL
Kenora District	102	44	146
Red Lake District	2	4	6
Fort Frances District	43	27	70
Dryden District	19	12	31
Atikokan District	6	13	19
Thunder Bay District	2	5	7
Sub-Total	174	105	279
EASTERN ONTARIO POPULATION	WHITE SWANS*	CYGNETS	TOTAL
Kemptville District	37	17	54
Total	211	122	333

*breeders, nest-failed adults and subadults

were counted at 34 winter sites. This was adjusted to account for an estimate of swans that wintered in the U.S. based on the record of the occurrence of wing-tagged birds.

Results

Trumpeter Swans range north in north-western Ontario well beyond settled areas into the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Limited resources do not permit a systematic sur-

vey in this vast area. The aerial inventory was focused on areas of highest density and is anecdotal in form and limited to accessible areas. The results of aerial surveys in the summer of 2010 in six MNR administrative districts (Kenora, Red Lake, Fort Frances, Dryden, Atikokan and Thunder Bay) and eastern Ontario in Kemptville District are presented in Table 1. They show that the greatest number of swans (146) was detected in

Trumpeter Swan, Wye Marsh. *Catherine Lewis, Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre*



LAKESHORE SITES	WHITE SWANS*	CYGNETS	TOTAL
LaSalle Park - Burlington	158	45	203
Kelly Lake	7	1	8
Oshawa	11	8	19
Bluffers Park	17	10	27
Wellers Bay	7	0	7
Port Dalhousie	1	0	1
Whitby	13	—	13
Huntsville	1	0	1
Mountsberg	8	—	8
Presqu'île	2	—	2
Humber Bay	2	0	2
Port Colborne	2	0	2
Newcastle	1	0	1
Bowmanville	1	0	1
Lakefield Beach	3	0	3
Amherst Island	4	—	4
Subtotal	238	64	302

RIVER SITES	WHITE SWANS*	CYGNETS	TOTAL
Port Severn	3	0	3
Severn River	11	6	17
Marmora	5	4	9
Seabright	3	0	3
Glen Morris	15	—	15
Nith River	5	—	5
<i>Hespeler</i>	7	—	7
Tilbury	1	0	1
Magnetewan	2	0	2
Washago	40	22	62
Subtotal	92	32	124

* breeders, nest-failed adults and subadult

Table 2: Number of Trumpeter Swans (identified as white swans* or cygnets) by habitat in Southern Ontario.

Kenora District and the smallest number (seven) was found in Thunder Bay District. In Table 2, the number of swans counted in winter at 27 sites, listed by habitat type, in southern Ontario is shown. On lakes, the greatest number (203) was found at LaSalle Park in Burlington and several areas reported only single swans. Table 3 presents counts of swans on seven ponds in southern Ontario with aeration equipment and one spring fed site where the swans were fed. Numbers at these sites ranged from a high of 51 at Wye Marsh to a low of three at Erin.

Table 3: Counts of Trumpeter Swans where they are fed on ponds with aeration equipment.

LOCATION	WHITE SWANS*	CYGNETS	TOTAL
Wye Marsh	47	4	51
Erin	2	1	3
Onendaga Farm	14	3	17
Newmarket	1	4	5
Leaskdale	1	6	7
Aurora 1	5	2	7
Aurora 2	12	4	16
Lemonville (spring fed)	5	3	8
Subtotal	87	27	114



Trumpeter Swans, Wye Marsh. *Courtesy of Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre*

Discussion

Kenora District

The first brood to be found in this district was reported west of Kenora by Dave Schneider in 1989. Bruce Ranta and Lil Anderson found eggshell debris in 1993 where nesting had been reported in 1992. In 1993, local cottagers reported a brood of three cygnets on Deception Creek (49° 45' N 94° 50' W). Bruce Ranta and Mike Dawe checked, but could not find them (L. Anderson, MNR files) but a single bird was reported carrying a leg band. Lil Anderson and Joan Sauve found a brood of seven cygnets on Split Lake (50° 25' N 94° 06' W) in 1994. The female was marked with an orange wing-tag. She had been released at Field Lake in Minnesota in 1990 (Anderson *et al.* 1996). In 2005, over 500 km north of Kenora, an On-

tario Breeding Bird Atlas field crew found a brood on Little Sachigo Lake (54° 09' N 92° 11' W) (Cadman *et al.* 2007). In the same year, Fred Zroback searched an area south of Oak Lake (50° 26' N 93° 50' W) and found 57 Trumpeter Swans (31 white swans, 26 cygnets). White swans are defined as adults, nest-failed breeders and sub-adults. In 2006, in the same area, he found 72 birds (44 white swans, 28 cygnets) and in 2010 (Table 1), the count was 146 swans, suggesting a steady and rapid increase (MNR files).

Red Lake District

Many swans were seen here from 2007 – 2009. In 2010, a brood with four cygnets was photographed by Reg Plett on McDowell Lake (52° 15' N 92° 45' W) over 300 km north of Kenora (MNR files).

Fort Frances District

The first Trumpeter Swan we know of in this district was reported in 2001. In 2005, eight cygnets and 12 white swans were seen by Darryl McLeod in the Rainy Lake area. One parent was marked with a red neck collar but the inscription could not be read. This colour had been assigned to Iowa. Four swans with yellow collars were seen in Fort Frances in 2006. Only one, near Off Lake, marked 69A, photographed on 8 June 2006, could be read (D. McLeod, MNR files). This was a female hatched in 2004 at Crex Meadows, Wisconsin (P. Manthey, pers. comm.). A helicopter survey flown in 2006 yielded 67 white swans and three nests in which incubation was still in progress. On 28 June 2010, the search found seven broods and 29 white swans for a total of 70. (Table 1).

Dryden District

A pair nested on Kaiashkamin Lake in 2007. On 28 June 2010, three more broods were found and 13 white birds for a total of 31 (M. Mosley, MNR files).

Atikokan District

In 2006, swans were seen in this District but breeding was not confirmed until 2010, when Amy Goodwin reported 19 swans (Table 1) (M. Mosley, MNR files).

Thunder Bay District

In 2007, a pair of swans nested on the Ontario side of the Minnesota-Ontario border on Rose Lake. In 2008, this pair nested on Arrow Lake (B. Ratcliff, MNR files). One parent was carrying a red neck collar marked 3H7. This female, hatched

in 2004, was released near Drakesville in Davis County, Iowa. It was banded on 14 May 2005 (D. Hoffman, pers. comm.). In 2010, a pair of Trumpeter Swans with five cygnets (Table 1) appeared on 3 October on Lang Lake, 3.5 km northeast of Upsala. They were found by Bob Stewart (B. Ratcliff, MNR files). The parents were marked with yellow neck collars, Y26 and U13. They had been marked in Wood County, Wisconsin in 2006 and Price County in 2007, respectively (P. Mathey, pers. comm.).

Sault Ste. Marie District

Don Meyer found two broods of Trumpeter Swans in 2005 on St. Joseph Island, containing four and six cygnets (H. Lumsden, unpublished data). In 2006, Marcel Pellegrini found a brood with two cygnets on Wabatongushi Lake (48° 20' N 084° 13' W) (K. Abraham, MNR files). In 2010, a single swan was seen by Don Hall in the spring. In summer, Eden Boyko flew a survey covering the area from St. Joseph Island to Lake George, but did not find any Trumpeter Swans. She found only Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*). Two pairs had five and one cygnets and a single parent was leading five cygnets (E. Boyko, MNR files).

In Figure 1, the distribution of nests and flightless broods of Trumpeter Swans in northwestern Ontario seen since 1989 is mapped. Some of these locations support more than a single brood and have been used for many years. All the swans in the northwestern population leave Ontario for the winter. Most of them overwinter in Minnesota and Wisconsin, but some may go further south.

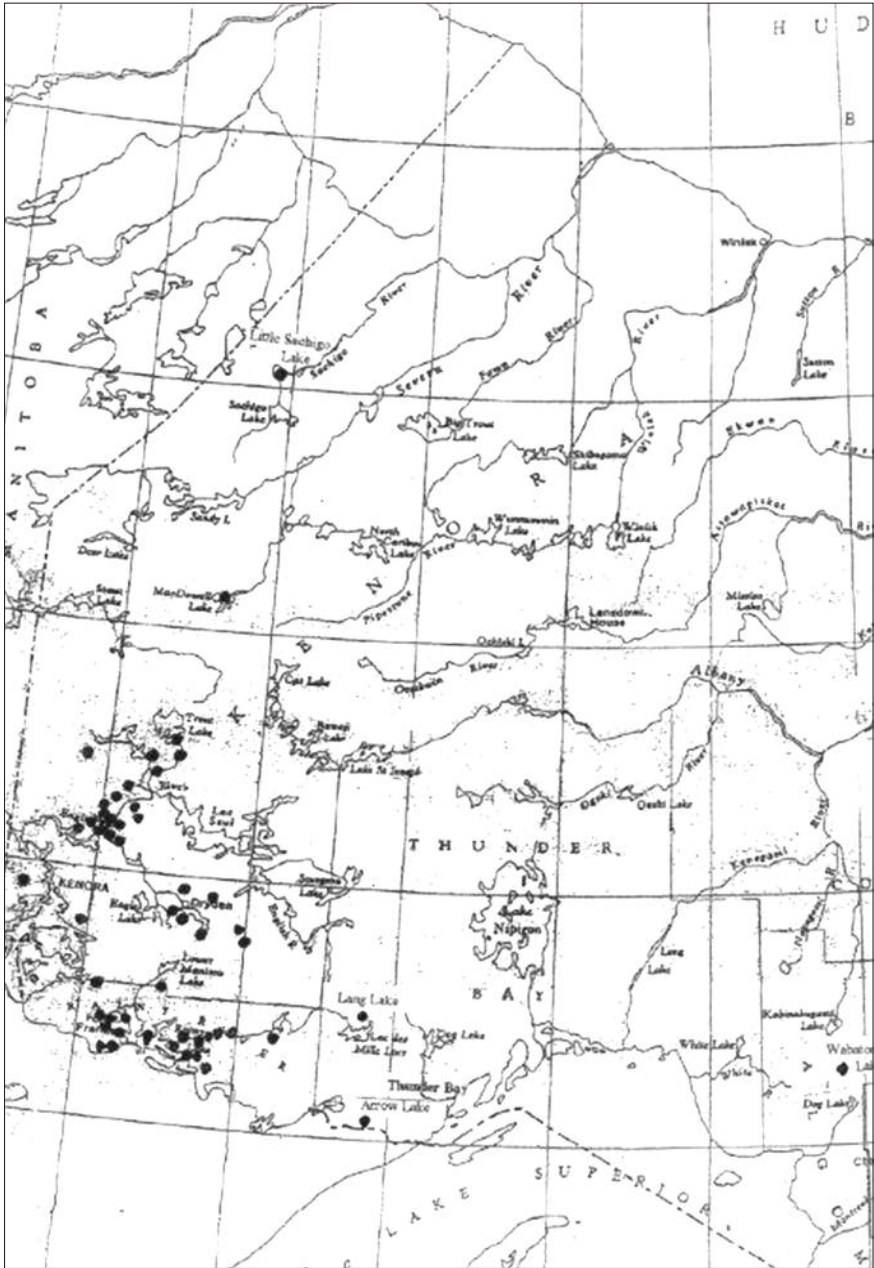


Figure 1. The distribution of nests and flightless broods of Trumpeter Swans in northwestern Ontario seen since 1989

The aerial survey carried out in summer by Eric McIntyre in part of Parry Sound District found 22 swans, but these are not included in the southern Ontario totals. The ground counts are presented in Table 2. Ten of these locations were on rivers and 16 were on lake shores. At 11 locations, the swans were fed. Table 3 presents counts made at seven locations where the ice was controlled with aeration equipment and one where a very strong spring kept the water open. At all seven of these, the swans were fed.

The question arose, how many swans were missed in southern Ontario. There were two locations on the Grand, three on the Thames and one on the Speed rivers, which usually held wintering swans in the past. We received no reports from these sites in 2010, although there were likely some birds there. Eight wing-tagged swans were reported from the U.S., one from Minnesota, one from Maryland, one from West Virginia, one from Wisconsin, two from Pennsylvania and two from New York. There were also seven unmarked swans reported, six from New York and one, the first, from Maine.

Quebec

In Quebec, tagged swans had been reported for some years along the Ottawa River at Tea Lake, near Temiscaming, Fabre, Remegny and Duparquet (H. Lumsden, unpub. data). We received an unusual report of two trumpeting swans that were flushed from a blueberry barren at Bergeronnes, (48° 15 N 069° 39 W) on 8 August 2010 (P. Welch, pers.

comm.). This locality is near the shore of the St. Lawrence River about 30 km northeast of Tadoussac. The first Trumpeter Swan nesting in Quebec since Barnston's report (Barnston 1860) was at Joutel (49° 50 N, 78° 33 W), 192 km northeast of Kirkland Lake (J. Fréchette, pers. comm.). In 2010, this pair, with tags 963 and E81 and with their two cygnets, wintered at LaSalle Park (44° 18 N 079° 51 W) in Burlington, Ontario, 830 km to the south.

Kemptville District

Trumpeter Swans in this District were first reported on 16 June 1996 by Winona Barker. Two birds were seen on Hudson Bay (44° 41 N 076° 17 W), Big Rideau Lake (D. Cuddy, MNR files). They probably came from New York State where feral Trumpeter Swans had been breeding for some years. In 1997, they returned and nested successfully (A. Mess, pers. comm.). They also bred there in 1998 and 2000 (I. Aikman, pers. comm.) and again in 2009 (K. Intini, unpub. data). To strengthen this new breeding population, releases of captive-raised swans were made at Portland (1999), Brockville (2000) and near Kingston (2003). Stefan Foerster found three breeding pairs in the Brockville area, raising five cygnets in 2002 and 10 cygnets in 2003. In 2004, they bred on Mud Lake and in 2005 at Bellamy Station, McIntosh Mills, Jellyby, Mud Creek and Lees Pond (Catarqui Conservation Authority Files).

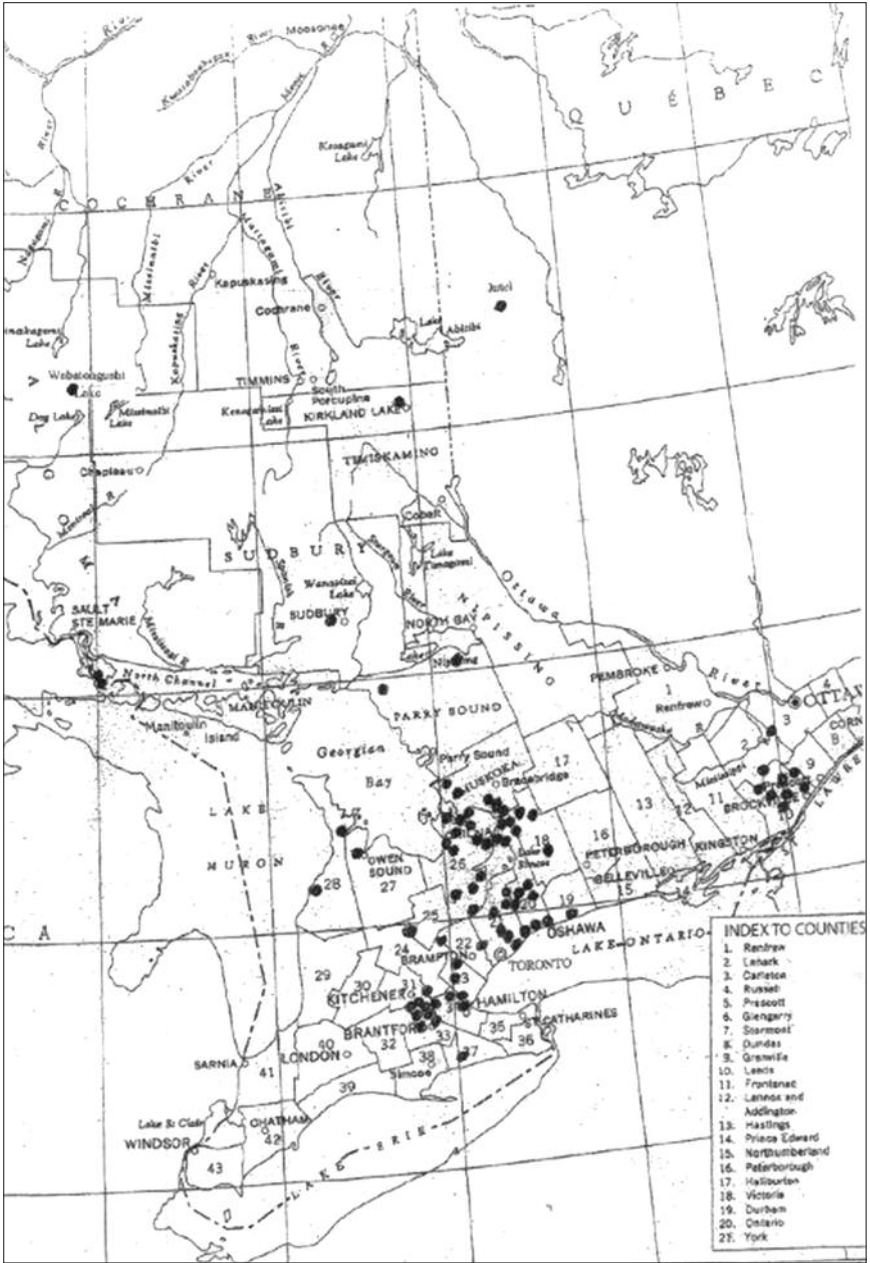


Figure 2. The distribution of Trumpeter Swan nests and flightless broods reported since 1993 in southern and eastern Ontario. Some locations support as many as three nests annually.

On 10 June 2010, Stefan Forester flew a survey and found 13 cygnets and 35 white swans in the area north-west of Brockville. On 27 June, a brood with four cygnets was found by Jeff Skevington on the Jock River west of Ashton (C. Lewis, pers. comm.). The inventory total for Kemptville District in 2010 was 17 cygnets and 37 white swans, total 54. We have no evidence that this population exchanges birds with those in southern Ontario.

Conclusion

The swans of the northwestern region of Ontario, as part of the Wisconsin-Minnesota population, can be considered to be self-sustaining. They can be expected to increase in density and

to expand their range to the north. On aerial surveys in 2010, 279 Trumpeter Swans were counted. In eastern Ontario, in a similar survey, 54 swans were found.

The southern Ontario population has been increasing steadily. There is extensive range to the north and east in Quebec into which they may spread as the population builds. Ground counts at 34 locations in the winter of 2010-2011 with an estimate of birds wintering in the U.S. gave a total of 540 swans. The total number of Trumpeter Swans in Ontario counted in 2010 was 873. Much suitable nesting range in northwestern Ontario was not surveyed and some swans were probably missed in southern Ontario.



Kowa

Waterproof | Dry Nitrogen Filled | Rubber Armor | Kowa KR Coating

THE PERFECT VIEW IS FROM HERE

**YF
SERIES**

The YF Series are specifically designed to provide a superior optical performance at an exceptional value. Our multi-coated lenses capture every detail with edge-to-edge clarity for a remarkably bright and sharp image.

kowa-usa.com



Acknowledgements

Funding for the aerial surveys was provided by the Trumpeter Swan Restoration Group through the Amherst Wildlife Foundation. We thank Steve Munroe of Trans Canada Pipelines for two hours of helicopter time used in the Kemptville District. MNR staff led field crews on the aerial surveys. We thank Fred Zroback, Melissa Mosley, Eden Boyko, Eric McIntyre and Stefan Foerster (Catarauqui Region Conservation Authority) for their help.

We thank Chip Weseloh, Chris Risley, Glenn Coady and Karl Konze for their comments which greatly improved this paper. We thank Diana Lumsden for typing drafts of this manuscript.

Literature Cited

- Anderson, L.J., H.G. Lumsden and B. Ranta.** 1996. Trumpeter Swans in the Kenora District of Ontario. *Ontario Birds* 14:105 – 110.
- Barnston, G.** 1860. Recollections of swans and geese of Hudson's Bay. *Ibis* 2:253 – 259.
- Cadman, M.D., D.A. Sutherland, G.G. Beck, D. Lepage and A.R. Couturier.** (eds). 2007. Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario 2001 – 2005. Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Ontario Nature. Toronto. 706pp.
- Lumsden, H.G.** 1984. The pre-settlement breeding distribution of Trumpeter (*Cygnus buccinator*) and Tundra Swans (*C. columbianus*) in eastern Canada. *Canadian Field Naturalist* 94(4):415 – 424.
- Lumsden, H.G.** 2010. Trumpeter Swans in Ontario 2008 – 2009. *Ontario Birds* 28:103 – 108.
-

Harry Lumsden

144 Hillview Road

Aurora, Ontario L4G 2M5

E-mail: theholtentwo@hotmail.com

Raymond and Beverley Kingdon

5024 Cenaber Crescent

Burlington, Ontario L7L 5G7

E-mail: bev.ki@sympatico.ca

Kyna Intini

1482 4th Concession West

Troy, Ontario L0R 2B0

Julie Kee

195 Wellington Street South, Suite 206

Hamilton, Ontario L8N 2R7