

The Trumpeter Swan blasts back



Photo/Susan R. Drennon

Once abundant throughout the United States, their resonant voices have been absent from the North Atlantic coast for almost 200 years

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HISTORICALLY, Trumpeter Swans, *Cygnus buccinator*, were widely distributed, summering throughout much of north-central North America and wintering along the Mississippi River and Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts (Bellrose, 1976). Once fairly abundant, the Trumpeter Swan populations decreased rapidly owing to excessive hunting in order to supply swan skins to the European millinery trade in the 18th century. Few records are available for the population that wintered along the east coast before being extirpated prior to 1800 (Rogers and Hammer, unpubl. report). This is the first report of Trumpeter Swans wintering along the Atlantic coast in over 180 years.

On March 10, 1984, the band numbers from two immature swans (tentatively identified as Trumpeters) marked with

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service aluminum tarsus bands and yellow patagial tags were reported to me by birder John Harrington from St. Michaels, Talbot County, Maryland. The band recovery information was subsequently forwarded to John Harcus of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to determine if the band numbers corresponded with Trumpeter Swans being introduced in Ontario, Canada. On March 19, 1984, Harry Lumsden of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources confirmed that the bands had been placed on sibling Trumpeter Swan cygnets at 73 days of age on August 22, 1983, at Cranberry Marsh, Ontario.

These cygnets were first observed loafing and feeding on a large tidal tributary of the Choptank River near the town of St. Michaels, Maryland. According to John Harrington (*pers. comm.*), they first appeared in mid-December during an extensive freeze and were observed on a regular basis until early April. I observed

and photographed the two Trumpeters there on March 19, 1984. The Trumpeters were last seen at this wintering location on April 5, 1984. It is assumed that they started their northward migration to the Ontario marshes where they first became capable of flight.

Harry Lumsden (*pers. comm.*) reported that these cygnets originated from Trumpeter Swan eggs obtained from the Grande Prairie flock located in the Peace River area of Alberta, Canada. The eggs were transported on June 9, 1983, to the western shore of Lake Ontario where personnel of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and the Canadian Wildlife Service used feral Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) as foster parents to hatch and rear these Trumpeter cygnets to flight stage. No information is available with regard to the date of departure of the two Trumpeters from Ontario and their subsequent migration to the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay.

While under observation the two Trumpeters were never accompanied by adult swans, suggesting that their initial fall migration was made without their foster parents. During the winter they displayed dominance over six to eight subadult, feral Mute Swans in the immediate vicinity and exhibited subordinate behavior to a breeding pair of Mute Swans.

Although Trumpeter Swans were removed from the endangered species list in 1971 when their estimated number reached 5000, they are still a protected species. They are relatively easy to spot in the field due to their size (they are the largest of the swans) and the absence of any yellow on the bill. Failing a good close view, the Trumpeter Swans' double-noted *ko-hoo*, which can be heard at distances over a mile, is unmistakable.

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