



Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator*

Trumpeter swans in North America neared extirpation in the early 1900s due to human encroachment, habitat destruction, and the commercial swan-skin trade. Small populations survived in isolated areas such as Yellowstone. Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, west of the park, was set aside in the 1930s specifically for this species. In the 1950s, a sizeable population of swans was discovered in Alaska. Today, more than 20,000 trumpeters exist in North America. Their population in the Greater Yellowstone area (GYA) is considered stable, but the park's population is declining. In recent years, fewer than 10 swans have lived here year-round. Winter numbers vary from 60 to several hundred. Reproduction rates are low. Scientists suspect that several facts are contributing to this decline:

- loss of wetlands during an extended drought in the late 20th and early 21st centuries
- fewer trumpeter swans taking up residence in the park
- competition with swans that migrate to the park for the winter
- increased predation by coyotes & wolves

Information on the GYA resident swan and wintering swan populations dates back to 1931 and 1971, respectively. Federal agencies conduct two annual surveys: The February survey counts how many migrant swans winter in the region; the September survey estimates the resident swan population and annual number of young that fledge (leave the nest).

Trumpeter swans are particularly sensitive to human disturbance. Because of this, park managers restrict human activity in known swan territories and nesting areas. Scientists are also conducting studies to determine the habitat requirements for the swan's nesting.

Identification

- Largest wild fowl in North America.
- White feathers, black bill with a pink streak at the base of the upper mandible.
- During migration, can be confused with the tundra swan, which is smaller, has rounder head, lacks pink mandible stripe, sometimes has yellow spot in front of eye.

Habitat

- Slow moving rivers or quiet lakes.
- Nest is a large, floating mass of vegetation.

Behavior

- Feed on submerged vegetation and aquatic invertebrates.
- Low reproduction rates: in 2007, 2009, and 2010, no cygnets fledged.
- Can fail to hatch eggs if disturbed by humans.
- Lay 4–6 eggs in June; cygnets fledge in late September or early October.
- Usually in pairs with cygnets in summer; larger groups in winter.

2010 Status

- Trumpeter swans are increasing in the Rocky Mountain region, stable in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, but declining in Yellowstone National Park.
- Winter population in the region varies from 2,000–4,000; in the park, varies from less than one hundred to several hundred.
- In 2010, only one pair of trumpeter swans nested in Yellowstone National Park; their nest failed, perhaps due to early season flooding.
- Limiting factors in Yellowstone appear to be flooding of nests, predation, competition with wintering swans, possibly effects of drought, and less immigration into the park from outside locations.