

TRUMPETER SWANS WINTERING IN SOUTHWESTERN WASHINGTON

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Historically, both Whistling and Trumpeter swans (*Olor columbianus* and *O. bucinator*) wintered in southwestern Washington and on the Columbia River. Lewis and Clark reported an abundant swan population and noted the difference in the abundance of the two species (Allen, P., History of the expedition under the command of Captains Lewis and Clark to the sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky Mountains down the River Columbia to the Pacific Ocean, performed during the years 1804-1805-1806. By order of the Gov. of U. S., Bradford and Inkeep, Phil. 2, 1814).

Jewett et al. (Birds of Washington State, Univ. Washington Press, Seattle, 1953) gave the status of the Trumpeter Swan as "Formerly migrant and winter resident both east and west of the mountains; no record in recent years."

In December 1967, a bird from a flock of 21 swans was shot near Clear Lake, Skagit County, Washington. It was dissected and identified as a Trumpeter Swan by Washington State Game Department biologists (Crowell and Nehls, Audubon Field Notes 22:469, 1968). In following years, confiscated swan kills suggested that the annually increasing flock in DeBay Slough, adjacent to the Skagit River, was predominantly Trumpeters (T. R. Wahl pers. comm.).

Since 1968 Washington State Game Department waterfowl population inventories have included the following Trumpeter Swan sightings: Skagit Bay (DeBay Slough area, Barney Lake, Beaver Lake, Clear Lake and surrounding areas), 1968-46, 1969-33, 1970-17, 1971-51, 1972-94, 1973-97, and 1974-92. (Winter Waterfowl Population Summary Sheets and 1973-74 Skagit Game Management Area wildlife observations, Washington State Game Department).

According to Larrison and Sonnenberg (Washington Birds Their Location and Identification, 1968), one report had been received from Grays Harbor, Washington, and the species was considered very rare.

In December 1970, a dead juvenile Trumpeter Swan was found near Leadbetter Point (Lat 46° 37' N, Long. 124° 03' W) on the north end of Long Beach Peninsula, Pacific County, Washington. The specimen was identified by trachea and sternum examination by the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge staff. In mid-January 1971, a second juvenile mortality was found on Loomis Lake, approximately 8 miles south of the first mortality. Identification of both specimens was confirmed 26 February 1971 by the Bird and Mammal Laboratory, Washington D.C.

On 22 February 1971, a flock of 26 swans was closely observed on the sand dune ponds at Surfside Estates near the south boundary of Leadbetter Point Wildlife Refuge. Eleven of these were tentatively identified as Trumpeters. Of these 11, 3 adults and 2 juveniles were further identified by their calls.

During the winter 1972-73, a flock of 80+ swans wintered on the ponds and sloughs of Long Beach Peninsula. Of these, 10-15 were tentatively identified as Trumpeters, although no positive confirmations were made.

On 28 December 1973, three adult swans in a flock of 15 on the sand dune ponds near Surfside Estates, were positively identified by call as Trumpeters. The other 12 were suspected to be Trumpeters, but not confirmed.

During the summer of 1972, Dr. W. J. L. Sladen banded and color marked Trumpeter Swans in Alaska. On 16 December 1972, a juvenile banded 30 July 1972 near Cordova, Alaska (blue neck collar 340 Y) was sighted on Loomis Lake by Willapa Refuge Staff. On 18 December, the same bird was found dead by Washington State Game Department personnel. Another neck-banded bird banded on

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the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska in June 1972 (08VY-adult female), was present with six other swans at Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor County, 8-27 December 1972 (James Morris; Crowell and Nehls, *Am. Birds* 27:653, 1973).

In the winter 1972-73, the DeBay flock in Skagit County included one Trumpeter Swan marked by Sladen; and the following winter two appeared (Reade Brown fide T. R. Wahl).

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service census data on the Lower Columbia River and Long Beach Peninsula indicate that southwest Washington is an important swan wintering area. Populations have been counted ranging from 800 in 1968 to 3,000 in 1971. Field and confirmed identifications on Long Beach Peninsula indicate that this area may support a number of wintering Trumpeter Swans. However, until more marked birds appear, or better aerial identification marks are discovered, the Trumpeter Swan incidence in the Lower Columbia River will remain speculative.

Although suspicion as to swan identification is justified, both past and present, the confirmed sightings indicate that the number of Trumpeters appear to be definitely increasing. The origin and possible inter-relationship between western Washington wintering populations would be of interest and worth further investigation.