

# A TRUMPETER SWAN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

BRAD SCHRAM, 763-E Birch Walk, Goleta, California 93017

On 22 January 1973 my family and I were on the Carrizo Plain at Soda Lake in San Luis Obispo County. At Ramer Lake, a small pond approximately 0.2 mile south of the town of California Valley, I saw two white birds on the opposite shore, little more than 100 yards distant. Training a 20x telescope on the birds, I saw them to be swans, both apparently mature in plumage. As the swans swam about I could see that one was significantly larger than the other. The larger swan had a head much the shape of a Canvasback's (*Aythya valisineria*). It became obvious the smaller bird was the expected Whistling Swan (*Olor columbianus*), and the larger a Trumpeter Swan (*Olor buccinator*). Desiring to get a photographic record, I returned to the car and put a 640mm lens on my camera, and getting as close as I dare to the birds, took a half dozen pictures. The pictures clearly show a Whistling Swan with a Trumpeter Swan (Figure 1).

An interesting feature was that in bright sunlight the Trumpeter Swan's white plumage shaded faintly towards cream, while the Whistling Swan's plumage tended toward a bluish cast. This was noticeable on the entire body of both birds. Neither of these subtle shades would be easily discernible without direct comparison between the two, but this was possible as they swam or walked the shoreline in one another's company.

Grinnell and Miller (*The Distribution of the Birds of California, 1944*) indicate the last southern California record occurred in the 1890s. Dawson (*The Birds of California, 1923*) states the last authenticated record was in 1898. Pyle and Small (*Annotated Field List, Birds of Southern California, 1961*) do not mention the Trumpeter Swan. McCaskie (*American Birds 27:662, 1973*) cites a report which indicates that the bird at California Valley was present from at least 13 January.



Figure 1. A Trumpeter Swan and Whistling Swan on Ramer Lake near California Valley, San Luis Obispo County, California, 22 January 1973.

Photo by Brad Schram