

*Wilson Bull.*, 92(3), 1980, p. 413

**Back carrying of young by Trumpeter Swans.**—Although Black-necked (*Cygnus melanocoryphus*), Mute (*C. olor*) and to a lesser extent, Black swans (*C. atratus*) are known to carry young on their backs, back-carrying is almost unknown among northern swans (Johnsgard and Kear, *Living Bird* 7:89–102, 1968). Johnsgard (*Waterfowl of North America*, Indiana Univ. Press 81, Bloomington, Indiana, 1975) stated the young of Trumpeter Swans (*C. buccinator*) have never been seen riding on a parent's back. During aerial surveys of Trumpeter Swans on the Kenai National Moose Range, Alaska, cygnets from 2 separate broods of swans were observed to climb on a parent's back as we passed over them at low altitude to determine brood size.

On 13 June 1978, 2 adult and 4 cygnets approximately 1-week-old were observed swimming closely together on the Moose River about 1.6 km east of Swan Lake. When we passed about 60 m overhead the swans made no attempt to flee, but on the second approach, about 45 m above the swans, 3, perhaps 4, of the cygnets were observed (by Bailey) climbing upon a parent's back between the adult's left wing tip and tail. Although the cygnets appeared alarmed, the parent made no obvious attempt to help the cygnets climb aboard. There was little available cover for escape in the 4-m-wide river at this location because of the stream's steep banks.

On 16 June 1978, Bangs observed identical behavior, as the same aircraft, a Piper Super-cub, passed 45 m over 2 adults and 4 week-old cygnets on a small lake south of Bay Lake, 45 km from the Moose River location. The family of swans was swimming about 100 m from shore, cover for escape was present, but not dense; the behavior was also observed during the second lower flight over the swans.

We are unaware of any reports of back-carrying of young by wild, arctic-breeding Trumpeter Swans. King and King (*First Int. Birds in Captivity Symp.*, Seattle, Washington, 8–12 Mar. 1978) observed young climbing on the back and hiding under a wing of a captive Trumpeter Swan on a nest, but not while the parent was on water. Back-carrying of young Trumpeter Swans has been observed in an introduced, temperate-breeding population. Hammer (*Wilson Bull.* 82:324–325, 1970) observed and photographed a cygnet on the back of an adult at Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota, and refuge manager H. Burgess (pers. comm.) observed cygnets of at least 2 families on the backs of parents several times during a period of 6 years. Johnsgard and Kear (1968) speculated that northern swans did not carry young because there were few underwater predators where northern swans nested, the long wings of northern swans made back climbing by cygnets too difficult and cygnets grew so rapidly and spent so much time feeding that climbing and resting on the parents' backs was not important.

Our observations suggested the cygnets we observed may have climbed on their parents' backs as an escape response initiated by the approaching low flying aircraft and perhaps the lack of adequate adjacent cover for escape. Predators observed near or believed responsible for destroying swan eggs or cygnets on the Kenai National Moose Range include otters (*Lutra canadensis*) and coyotes (*Canis latrans*), but mink (*Mustela vison*), bears (*Ursus arctos*, *U. americanus*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) and Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are also present and may be possible predators. No large predatory fish live in lakes used by nesting swans. Our observations suggest young cygnets of Trumpeter Swans may instinctively climb on their parents' backs and possibly hide under their wings (King and King 1978) when endangered. This response of cygnets to danger has seldom been observed because young cygnets of Trumpeter Swans have rarely been intensively studied in areas in the wild where the impact of predators on cygnet survival may be significant.—THEODORE BAILEY, EDWARD BANGS AND VERNON BERNIS, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Moose Range, Box 2139, Soldotna, Alaska 99669. Accepted 29 July 1979.*