

THE INVENTORY OF TRUMPETER SWANS IN ONTARIO IN 2005

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The Trumpeter Swan inventory for 2005 in southern Ontario, estimated from wing tag reports, adjusted for missed birds, and for the ratios of tagged to untagged swans recorded in the winter of 2004-05 was 359 swans. To this total were added 29 birds released before 1st September. To complete the 1 September population estimate, the wild production for the summer of 2005 must be added. There were 48 known pairs that attempted to breed. Thirty-eight of these pairs were successful in raising 135 cygnets. The mean per breeding pair was 2.8 cygnets and the mean per successful pair was 3.6 cygnets. There were eight breeding pairs that failed and an additional two pairs where the brood outcome is uncertain. Thus, our 2005 estimate of number of swans in southern Ontario totals 523.

This estimate of 523 swans may be too low, however. By examining the wing tag numbers tallied on the wintering grounds, we find many pairs that disappear from the record in late March or April, the beginning of the breeding season. They are not seen again until November through January when they reappear, often with a brood. We have no idea where these pairs nested. Furthermore, there are wintering sites for which we receive only sporadic or no reports or counts. These winter reports are typically from shallow, slow flowing rivers and occasional open areas on lakes and ponds where creeks enter and maintain open water.

The advice of geneticists is that, in order to achieve a self-sustaining population of Trumpeter Swans, we should have a population of 500 birds containing 100 breeding-age pairs. In 2004, we achieved the first objective with over 500 birds. Although some swans

breed at 3 years old, and a very few even at 2 years of age, most swans do not start to nest until they are 4 years of age. Using the wing tag numbers, we are able to determine which are 4 years of age or older. There were 15 pairs in which neither partner was marked, which fledged broods in 2005. Among the unmarked pairs, there were eight more which are not known to have nested. Including the breeding pairs and pairs in which one bird was of known age over 4, we have a total of at least 82 pairs. This compares with the count of 64 pairs in 2004. The goal of 100 breeding-age pairs may be reached in 2006.

This year, there is evidence of further movement into Ontario of breeding-age trumpeters from Minnesota and Michigan. The Kenora District-Fort Frances area in western Ontario is just north of International Falls, Minnesota. This population of swans very likely originated from Minnesota and surprised all when a brood was found by a Breeding Bird Atlas team on Little Sachigo Lake in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. This brood was approximately 900 km (559 miles) north of their probable wintering ground on the Otter Tail River, Otter Tail County, Minnesota. There also was a brood reported on a lake northeast of Dryden, Ontario, which is east of Kenora and north of the Fort Frances area.

The restored Michigan Trumpeter Swan population is also moving into the Sault Ste. Marie area of Ontario. In 2005, two broods of trumpeters were recorded on the southwestern shore of St. Joseph Island, Ontario, just north of the eastern end of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.