



TRUMPETINGS

Voice of the Trumpeter Swan Society

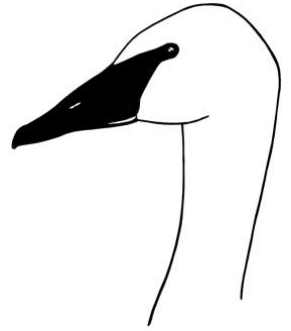
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Since 1968: Assuring the vitality and welfare of wild Trumpeter Swans

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Thanks to you, nearly 5,000 people learned about swans!

Thanks to you, the nine webinars in 2024 shared fascinating stories and information of trumpeter swans in different parts of North America. **You can watch the webinars on our new Swan Webinars page in the Swan Information section of our website.** Each webinar has a direct link to the recording.

Below are descriptions about each webinar and one of the comments from an attendee. Each webinar is about an hour in length which includes questions and answers. Your support made these webinars a reality. **Thank you!**

ONTARIO: Learn how the late Harry Lumsden led the restoration of trumpeter swans to Ontario and received one of Canada's highest awards for his efforts.

See how, when and where wing tags are put on Ontario trumpeter swans. Discover the near and far way places Ontario's trumpeter swans have been reported in Canada and the USA, and much more!

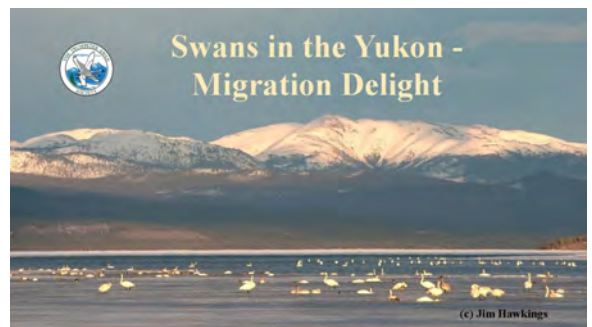
"A great presentation. Good information and presented in a way that all could understand."



YUKON: Swans are an extremely important conservation and cultural icon in Yukon Territory. In this webinar you will learn more about swans in this remote part of the continent!

Yukon swan experts use the multimedia wonders of Zoom to share their knowledge of swan identification, populations, nesting, behavior, and migration. Watch live animations of migrations, swan videos and more!

"Enjoyed the presentations - great speakers, great information, LOVED the videos."



Thanks to you, webinars were a success!

Thanks to you, future generations will know the story of the return of trumpeter swans across North America and the issues trumpeter swans face. You made it possible to create, record and share these webinars.



HARRIMAN STATE PARK OF IDAHO: Learn about the park's role as a sanctuary for nesting trumpeter swans and a crucial wintering ground for Rocky Mountain swans from both Canada and the USA.

- Discover the impact of extreme weather and efforts to rescue and relocate swans during harsh conditions in 1988 and 1989
- Learn about vital aquatic foods for swans
- Planning a trip? Find out what Harriman State Park and its surroundings offer visitors, just an hour's drive from Yellowstone National Park

"This was an excellent presentation. Knowledgeable presenters and very good visuals."



RIVERLANDS: Discover the captivating history of overwintering trumpeter swans at the Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary near St. Louis, Missouri. Dive into their significance in the Mississippi flyway.

Learn how swans are monitored and counted at Riverlands and when the best times are to see swans. Discover the broad array of swan programs and experiences offered at this Audubon center to thousands of visitors each year.

"All the information is interesting to me. This winter I plan to go to Riverlands to view the swans!"



YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK: Discover the rich history of trumpeter swans in Yellowstone, a haven celebrated for its unique geothermal wonders and charismatic wildlife.

Journey through the ebbs and flows of swan populations within the park, from their flourishing numbers before the 1960s to the challenges faced in recent decades.

Learn about Yellowstone's proactive conservation strategies and ongoing research endeavors aimed at ensuring the enduring presence of the iconic trumpeter swan within its boundaries.

"Well done. Very helpful. Easy to understand at all levels."

Thanks to you, webinars were a success!



IOWA: Explore how trumpeter swans became ambassadors for wetland conservation in Iowa.

You will also

- Be inspired by Iowa's engagement and education programs as swans were restored
- Learn about the migratory movements of Iowa trumpeter swans and the survival of cygnets in their first winter!

"Great story...good speakers. Learned about their cygnet studies which I had not known about."



ASK A SWAN EXPERT: Discover the fascinating history and behaviors of swan families and what happens over a year as eggs are laid and cygnets hatch and grow, swan behaviors and communications, spring and fall migration, mute and trumpeter swan interactions and so much more.

"It was interesting to learn about swan behaviors and ways they communicate. Wonderfully informative webinar - thank you all very much!!"



TRACKING MIDWEST SWANS: Manitoba, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin and Arkansas used GPS/GSM tracking collars to track more than 100 trumpeter swans over 3 years. Find how family status and latitude affected migration departure and arrival dates. Discover the results of lead on the swans in the study. Explore some of the individual stories of these collared swans that were reported through Trumpeter Watch.

"I love the way the data was shared by state - easy to understand, and it really showed the outliers as well."



LEAD POISONING IN SWANS. Learn:

- Why lead is a problem
- How to recognize a sick swan in the wild
- How to safely capture a sick swan to take to a wildlife rehab center
- Diagnosis and treatment of a sick swan at a wildlife rehab center
- What Minnesota has done to address lead poisoning

"Of particular note was the discussion of visible (physical) symptoms. The discussion of treatment and the costs was very interesting."

“Return of the Trumpeters” film– making the film

By Steve Devon



In the film you will meet people who helped the return of trumpeter swans. Above (top left to right) Joe Johnson, Larry Gillette, Carrol Henderson; (bottom left to right) Ruth Shea, Tiffany Mayo, Doug Smith

How it all began

In 2008, I called **Joe Johnson** at Kellogg Bird Sanctuary near Battle Creek, Michigan, to learn more about trumpeter swans. I knew very little about the birds and knew Joe had worked with them. I asked him, “Joe, what makes this bird so special?” Joe chuckled and said, “You’ll find out.” Those three simple words led my wife Char and me on a mission: a wildlife documentary on trumpeter swans. In 2010, we embarked on a trip to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to begin filming this wildlife documentary. My original plan was a traditional, year-in-the-life of trumpeter swans’ film, but the more we learned, the more we realized this story had a much broader and deeper range.

It was amazing and daunting to learn of all the states and provinces involved in restoring this magnificent bird. Our scope changed dramatically, leading to traveling within Michigan and several locations across North America. The focus of this film was no longer just documenting the behavior of trumpeter swans—it was about telling the story of the people responsible for their restoration across North America.

Filming Begins

In 2010, we began filming trumpeter swans at Seney National Wildlife Refuge in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. We presented the film project concept a year later at our first Trumpeter Swan Society Swan Conference in Polson, Montana. That was our first personal introduction to many of the people and programs involved in restoring trumpeter swans to North America, including the Society’s members and board members.

In 2013 my friend and longtime biologist Terry DeBruyn contacted me and asked, “What are you up to these days, Steve?” I told him, “I’m working on a film about trumpeter swans.” Terry told me about the recent loss of his sister and brother-in-law and mentioned she was an avid bird lover. Terry shared his sister had requested a portion of her estate go toward funding an avian project. That led to a bequest to the Trumpeter Swan Society from the Patricia and James Bigley Trust for the film project.

“Return of the Trumpeters” film– making the film

What a great organization the Trumpeter Swan Society is. They are such an important resource for me, and I could never have finished this film without their guidance, expertise, and friendship.

Over the next several years, I filmed in several locations nationwide, including Iowa. There, I met **Dave Hoffman** from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Like his predecessor, **Ron Andrews**, Dave helped to raise public awareness about trumpeter swans and promote citizen efforts in their restoration. In the winter, I filmed the Iowa Swan Soiree.



What a great event and opportunity for Iowa children and adults to learn more about trumpeter swans. I was invited to film swan releases at Viking Lake State Park, Lake Icaria State Park, and Lake Anita State Park in the spring.

What amazed me the most was the number of schoolchildren attending those releases. The enthusiasm was tremendous. Between 1995 and 2021, the Iowa DNR released over 1,200 trumpeter swans in over 80 locations. What a remarkable effort.

One of my favorite memories of Iowa was at the swan releases and seeing representatives from zoos nationwide who had traveled to Iowa with trumpeter swans from their own swan restoration programs. That led to meeting and interviewing **Tiffany Mayo**, the Trumpeter Swan Species Survival Plan Coordinator and Lead Hospital Keeper at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. It was wonderful to learn how zoos across the country are truly benefitting trumpeter swans.

In 2018, I made a quick, one-day trip to Alaska to interview retired pilot/biologist **Jim King**. Jim was 91 years old. Jim’s aerial survey in 1968 showed nearly 3,000 trumpeter swans in Alaska, offering hope for biologists when many believed trumpeter swans were headed toward extinction. When I mentioned how significant his contribution was to trumpeter swans, Jim just shrugged and humbly said, “Oh, I was just doing my job.” That was Jim. What an honor to have the opportunity to talk with him in the last chapter of his life.



Another highlight was looking for trumpeter swans while driving across reservation areas of Montana with biologist **Dale Becker**. Dale worked with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in northwest Montana, where they began swan restoration in 1995 to return swans to their tribal homeland. It was exciting to be there to film one of those releases for the film. Dale was instrumental in the swan restoration efforts and a big reason for the return of trumpeter swans in Montana.



I traveled to Oregon to meet biologist **Gary Ivey** about Oregon’s swan restoration efforts at Summer Lake Wildlife Area and across the region. It was special to be there as he and **Marty St. Louis** released a pair onto Summer Lake, knowing how significant each release was to the struggling swan population in the region.



“Return of the Trumpeters” film– making the film



I also appreciated my trip to Wisconsin and the opportunity to interview **Sumner Matteson and Randy Jurewicz** (top left) with the Wisconsin DNR. What made Wisconsin so interesting was their early efforts using decoy rearing. Sumner and Randy played essential roles in the overwhelming success of Wisconsin’s program, working with many great partners.

I enjoyed interviewing **Dave Olson** (top right) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Dave represented the National Wildlife Refuge System in the film, having worked at Red Rock Lakes NWR and Seney NWR, highlighting the Refuge system's significant role in the restoration efforts.

In 2019, I received word that Yellowstone National Park had a trumpeter swan family show up at Swan Lake. It had been over 50 years since Swan Lake had any swans. I was able to interview the legendary biologist **Doug Smith**. Doug was known for his work in introducing wolves back to Yellowstone, and now he was focused on trumpeter swans in the park, especially with the very low numbers there. Doug made a truly excellent case for restoring trumpeter swans in Yellowstone

Two of the biggest contributors in the film are **Larry Gillette and Carrol Henderson** from Minnesota. Both were pioneers in Minnesota’s swan restoration efforts. Larry’s efforts and the Hennepin County Parks Reserve District to raise swans in captivity are amazing, and their insight and efforts helped establish the best approach to restore trumpeters in Minnesota. Carrol led the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Nongame Wildlife Program. His trips to Alaska to bring back eggs to raise in captivity and his abilities to educate and inspire the public were so important. Other states then went to Alaska as well.

Three people had a tremendous impact on me in the early days of this film project. **Ruth Shea** had a big heart for trumpeter swans and worked closely with every agency involved, especially in the Rocky Mountain region where swans struggled. She had a special place in her heart for George Melendez Wright and his pioneering contributions to trumpeter swans at Yellowstone and Red Rock Lakes NWR. I knew immediately that Ruth needed to be in the film to represent that history.



Harry Lumsden was fascinating, with incredible historical accounts of trumpeter swans. Harry was revered by many and is credited with bringing trumpeter swans back to Ontario. Harry was a magical storyteller and seemed larger than life to me.

One of my favorite memories of Harry was at the Polson, Montana TTSS conference. I showed the first footage of the swan pair and their newly hatched cygnets. Toward the end of the presentation, Harry got up and left the room. As he walked past me, he had tears in his eyes. Afterward, he found me and said, “That is the best footage of trumpeter swans I’ve ever seen.” That was such a meaningful compliment to me, coming from Harry. I think seeing the lives of the young cygnets thriving in the wild reminded Harry of what all the hard work and devotion had made a reality.

“Return of the Trumpeters” film– making the film

And finally, **Joe Johnson**. Joe was one of the gruffest, opinionated people I had ever met. I was interested in historical footage of Joe and his trip to Alaska to obtain eggs that he later brought back to Kellogg to rear. I arranged to meet him and the head of Kellogg Bird Sanctuary one evening. We were looking at old video clips from Joe’s Alaska trip and, later, of him taking eggs out of an incubator, eventually watching the cygnets hatch. Images of Joe feeding the newly hatched swans appeared on the screen, and I looked over at Joe, who was watching with a gentle smile and a tear running down his face. I quietly said to him, “Joe, is this the highlight of your career?” With a low voice, he said, “Oh yes. Without a doubt.” That evening, I saw a different side of him—a side that told me volumes about Joe Johnson’s heart underneath that gruff exterior.

My beloved wife Char passed away in 2019. Then there were numerous hurdles that delayed this film project. I sometimes thought the project would never be finished. But I was determined to continue and finish this film. Too many people had devoted so much of their lives to this magnificent bird, and I wanted to honor them. And so, 14 years after I initially began filming a trumpeter swan pair and their 5 cygnets at Seney NWR, the film was now complete.

PBS stations begin to air the film

PBS was interested in the film, which was great news. There was one challenge—they needed it to fit into a 1-hour timeslot—or exactly 56:46. That meant I needed to cut close to an hour out of the film. That was one of the most challenging things I’ve ever faced. I spent the entire summer going through and editing the film down. But I realized it was a good length, especially for viewers who didn’t know about trumpeter swans.



In July 2024 the film was made available to PBS station managers across the country. Right away, a handful of states began picking it up to broadcast. Today, “Return of the Trumpeters” has been shown in over twenty states and counting.

It’s hard to imagine that result, especially when looking back at the beginning and all the hard work in the field. That first year of filming was a commitment of 16 trips to Michigan’s Upper Peninsula to capture the lives of that swan family and witness so much amazing behavior. You see so much when you spend hundreds of hours with a trumpeter swan family.



It’s those moments you wait for as a cinematographer, moments that won’t allow you to pack up early despite the heat, cold, rain, or snow. Or the countless evenings that the mosquitoes, flies, and ticks were so bad that I wanted to pack up. But I didn’t—anything to get the perfect shot.

The challenges of filming don’t last, but the images and experiences do.

I am so incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to tell this story, a story like no other about a bird like no other. Do you remember when I asked Joe Johnson at the beginning of this project, “What makes this bird so special?” and Joe responded, “You’ll find out.” Well, he was right, and I’m forever grateful I did.

The Trumpeter Swan Society is deeply grateful to filmmaker Steve Devon for making this beautiful and important film, “Return of the Trumpeters”. It will be available for purchase in our Gift Shop in 2025.



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In This Issue:

- Thanks to you, nearly 5,000 people learned about swans!
- Swan webinars were a success!
- "Return of the Trumpeters" - making the film

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TRUMPETINGS EDITORS
Jeffrey Nelson, Margaret Smith

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