The Trumpeter Swan Society 2014 Annual Report

Through your generous support in 2014, much has been accomplished in Trumpeter Swan conservation. We are pleased to report the positive impact your gifts made to Trumpeter Swans across North America.

Swan research
In February 2014, TTSS partnered with the International Swan Specialist Group to host the 5th International Swan Symposium and 23rd Trumpeter Swan Society Conference in Easton, Maryland. Nearly 100 swan specialists from 16 countries convened to share the latest research and management information on the eight recognized swan species of the world. There were 50 sessions over the four day conference.

Topics and research reports covered a wide range - from population status information to breeding biology, migration, and an assessment of issues that threatens each of the world’s swan species. There were also workshops on minimizing avian collisions and better methods to estimate swan populations.

Special sponsorships helped cover a portion of the costs of the symposium. Virtually all of the planning and coordination took place in 2013.

Staff, Directors, and volunteers contributed many hundreds of extra hours to make the Symposium a great success. Through this success, TTSS again demonstrated its capability of worldwide partnership in swan conservation and its continuing leadership in gathering and sharing the best scientific swan research, as it has done since the first Swan Conference hosted in 1969.
Trumpeter Swan issues
Although swans seem to be doing well in some areas, their range and population remains significantly reduced from levels prior to European settlement. Threats to swans and their habitats continue to increase. Requests for expertise and assistance from the Society are at an all-time high. Board and staff review and respond to these many requests.

Swan conservation is shifting from a restoration mode to a habitat and population conservation mode in some regions. However, very low numbers in the intermountain west of the US is a major issue we are continuing to address. Reducing and reversing habitat loss and degradation, and mortality issues such as lead poisoning and power line collisions will require major attention as will attention to the long term negative impacts of climate change on swan habitats and populations.

Creating a new Strategic Plan
In 2014, the Society’s Board initiated work on a new Strategic Plan, thanks to a generous foundation grant.

Prior to a strategic plan board retreat in November, a broad “swan community” was engaged through an online survey to TTSS members, donors, waterfowl biologists, agencies, past TTSS board members, and the general public. In addition, we conducted in-depth phone surveys of 18 swan agency managers from Canada and the United States as well as representatives from each of the Flyways. We received valuable input about the future needs faced by Trumpeter Swans as seen by management agencies facing shifting priorities in funding, as well as their input into the most critical role TTSS can play in the next five years.

In addition to providing valuable input into priorities for Trumpeter Swan issues from a diversity of groups and individuals, the surveys allowed TTSS to engage its members, the public, and critical agency partners in our strategic process. Preplanning prior to the November board retreat included the formation of a Strategic Approach Planning team and several Board and staff meetings to identify strategic priorities as well as to plan, execute, and review the surveys.

In November, a three day facilitated Strategic Plan Board Retreat was held in Minnesota to discuss the findings and begin creation of a new Strategic Plan.

Thanks to a generous grant, TTSS board and staff held a facilitated three day strategic planning retreat.

Left: Board members Jeff Nelson and Carey Smith participate in the planning process.
Right: Minnesota’s MAP facilitators led the retreat and guided the process.

All photos by Margaret Smith except where noted
The Trumpeter Swan Society 2014 Annual Report

2015 North American Trumpeter Swan Survey
One of our highest priorities in 2014 was to work with State, Provincial, and Federal agencies in the United States and Canada to ensure the 2015 North American rangewide survey for Trumpeter Swan is completed. The last continental survey was done in 2010. At that time, TTSS recognized that without late significant coordination with the agencies by TTSS, the 2010 survey would not have been completed in several significant geographic areas.

TTSS continued its strong advocacy for the 2015 North American Trumpeter Swan Survey. The Society is a member of an international steering committee to guide the survey in 2015 and improve the design and efficiency of the count. This is the only continent wide estimate of Trumpeter numbers. It began in 1968 and has been conducted every five years since 1975.

The survey results are critical to monitoring the continued successful recovery and management of the species, providing a scientific basis for assessing current populations, and actions needed for ongoing management decisions.

Other programs and efforts

Lead Poisoning:
We continued to advocate for a reduction of lead shot, bullets, and lead fishing tackle in the environment and mitigation of power line collisions throughout North America. In 2014, we remained very active helping in the mitigation of the serious lead poisoning problem that has resulted in the deaths of over 3,500 swans in recent years in the Pacific Northwest.

We continued to work with over 100 other conservation groups to encourage the Environmental Protection Agency to require that all sporting ammunition and fishing tackle be lead free.

Restoration Projects:
In 2014, we continued to work with partners on Trumpeter restoration projects and conservation needs in the intermountain west. Our participation at the Pacific Flyway and Greater Yellowstone Working Group meetings assisted efforts to achieve Pacific Flyway Plan objectives for the US portion of the Rocky Mountain Population. This effort includes restoration projects in Idaho’s Teton Basin; Montana’s Flathead Indian Reservation, Blackfoot River Valley, and Middle Madison River; Oregon’s Summer Lake Wildlife Management Area; and in Wyoming at Yellowstone National Park and the Green River Basin.

We continued to assist Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Oregon; Turnbull NWR, Washington; Ruby Lake NWR, Nevada; and other NWRs with Trumpeter Swan management and conservation. Nearly 60 refuges throughout the United States provide habitat for Trumpeters sometime during the year.

Aerial surveys of swans will be an important part of the 2015 North American Trumpeter Swan Survey. Photo by Bill Quirk
Other programs and efforts (continued)

Trumpeter Watch:
Initiated in 2009, “Trumpeter Watch” continued TTSS’s collection and recordings of citizen sightings of wintering Trumpeters. The program’s goal is to track fall and spring migration and changes in winter distribution. Migration traditions were lost through the near extinction of Trumpeters over a century ago in the Interior Population. In late 2014, the program was expanded from recorded sightings below the 40th parallel to all sightings of wintering Trumpeter Swan populations.

Greater Yellowstone:
The Greater Yellowstone area remains a focus area for our Trumpeter Swan work. TTSS discovered major errors in status assessment of Arctic Grayling populations (see page 8-9). Arctic Grayling is a rare fish species of concern in the region. Actions proposed for grayling management could have seriously damaged swan habitat and management at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, the only one of the over 500 refuges founded specifically for Trumpeter Swans. Due to extensive TTSS staff work, the US Fish and Wildlife Service decided that listing of grayling in this area is not warranted. This is a positive step in our continued advocacy for improved habitat management for swans in the Greater Yellowstone area.

Pacific Northwest:
Washington and British Columbia winter the vast majority of the Pacific Coast Population of Trumpeter Swans. This population comprises two-thirds of all of the Trumpeter Swans in existence. We worked to bring public attention to the impact of lead poisoning and avian collision issues on swan and bird populations. In addition, continued development and loss of agricultural lands will have serious consequences for wintering swans. Our draft Strategic Plan goals include working with partners to address the very serious issue of declining winter swan habitat in the region.

Operations and administration
The Trumpeter Swan Society began a significant transition in 2014 with the hiring of Margaret Smith who took up the reins of Executive Director in February 2014 following John Cornely’s retirement in December 2013. In August 2014, Associate Director Becky Abel left TTSS’s part time Associate Director position to take a full time position with another conservation organization.

Our staff and Board continued to contribute significant volunteer time to meet increasing demands on our time and services within the limited financial and staff resources available.

We continued diversification of our Board of Directors with the addition of Carl Woodward. Carl was appointed an Assistant United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey in 1971, has served as Chief of the Environmental Protection Division, has been trustee of the New Jersey Institute of Local Government Attorneys, has lectured on various topics in municipal law, and has taught zoning and planning at Seton Hall Law School as an adjunct professor. Carl is also an avid birder.

Stepping down from the Board of Directors in 2014 following the completion of their terms were Ron Andrews, Rob Morgan, and Ruth Shea. TTSS is deeply grateful for their Board service and all they have done to help TTSS achieve its mission to assure the vitality and welfare of wild Trumpeter Swans.
Operations and administration (continued)
Our membership challenge match program continued in 2014, funded by one of our Directors. We completed updating our membership data management system, purchased in 2013. We revised and began improvements to our financial reporting using standard accounting practices and reports.

The Society experienced a net income loss of $44,841 in 2014. Much of this was due to revenue for the Symposium and Special Projects collected in prior year 2013 and expensed in 2014 (the prior year 2013 net income was $44,148).

However, funding the basic capacity needs of TTSS for both unrestricted and restricted programs continues to be a significant issue. The new Strategic Plan includes a key goal of investing in our infrastructure. We need your help. Your generous donations make a critical impact on what TTSS can accomplish in Trumpeter Swan conservation. Without your help, TTSS will not be able to be the strong and vital voice of Trumpeter Swans, the ambassadors of healthy wetlands which sustain countless plant and animal species.

Our success in assuring the vitality and welfare of wild Trumpeter Swans is because of your ongoing and loyal support. We thank you, all of our donors and supporters, who made 2014 a year of many successes. There is much more work to be done and many challenges as we transition into a new Strategic Plan and the need to fund existing and future capacity. We know we can count on you to be our strong partners in swan conservation. All we have already accomplished has been because of your generous support.

2014 Financial Statements

Thank you for your commitment to Trumpeter Swan conservation!
The Board and staff of The Trumpeter Swan Society extend our heartfelt and deep appreciation to the more than 400 members and donors whose generous support made such an important impact in 2014. Thank you!

TTSS also thanks these foundations, agencies and 5th International Swan Symposium/23rd Trumpeter Swan Conference sponsors for their commitment to Trumpeter Swan conservation.

Foundations and Agencies:
Faith Ranch, Modesto, CA; Fanwood Foundation; Felburn Foundation; Summerlee Foundation; Puget Sound Energy; Wiancko Charitable Trust; Windway Foundation; William J. Maeck and Shirley A. Maeck Family Foundation; US Forest Service; US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Sponsors of the 5th International Swan Symposium/23rd Trumpeter Swan Society Conference:
Atlantic Flyway Council; Avian Power Line Interaction Committee; Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge; Center for Biological Diversity; Central Flyway Council; John Cornely; Cupcake Vineyards; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; Ducks Unlimited Canada; Larry Gillette; Steve Holmer; Dr. Jerome Katchin Waterfowl Foundation; Long Point Waterfowl; Maryland Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Ornithological Society; Mississippi Flyway Council; Naturalist Journeys; Jeff Nelson; Pabst Brewing Company; Pacific Coast Joint Venture; Pacific Flyway Council; Patuxent Research Refuge; Eileen Rees; Regal Swan Foundation; Talbot Bird Club; Trumpeter Swan Antiques; UK Swan Studies Group; USDA Wildlife Research Center; USDA Wildlife Services; Waterfowl Chesapeake; Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust; Zango Creative.
In July 2015, my sister and I visited Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Carl Mitchell, TTSS member and retired Refuge biologist, showed us this magnificent Refuge. We met Bill West, the Refuge manager, and his wonderful team. Here are some of photos of this enchanting Refuge. The Refuge website also has an excellent virtual tour.

Red Rock Lakes NWR was established in 1935 with a special emphasis on protecting the Trumpeter Swan. At that time, less than 100 swans were in the Greater Yellowstone Area. They were the only known remnant of North America’s Trumpeters until the discovery of Trumpeters in parts of Canada and Alaska in later years.

This issue of *Trumpetings* includes the story (pages 8-9) of how TTSS and Red Rock Lakes NWR worked together to understand and find a solution to potential management actions to protect Arctic Grayling, a fish in the Centennial Valley, that would have negatively impacted swans.

Photos, top right, clockwise.

“Trumpeter Swan Nesting” sign at the Shambo Stagecoach Station site; Upper Red Rock Lake; Lower Red Rock Lake; the Refuge teems with wildlife including pronghorn antelope; a beaver lodge on Elk Springs Creek (facing south); Elk Springs Creek at Widgeon Pond (facing north); Widgeon Pond and the backdrop of the Centennial Mountains; the Refuge Headquarters has fascinating exhibits and displays including this exquisite Trumpeter Swan pen and cygnet.

Photos by Colleen Giddings and Margaret Smith
Arctic Graylings and the Centennial Valley

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is considered the most important nesting area for Trumpeter Swans in the western US. This beautiful refuge is located in Montana’s Centennial Valley, west of Yellowstone National Park.

Last year, over two hundred of Greater Yellowstone’s more than 600 Trumpeters summered in the Centennial Valley. These Trumpeters are the smallest and most vulnerable breeding swan population in North America.

Besides the vast Refuge marshes, there are over 300 historic nesting territories on nearby federal and private lands. The survival of these swans is directly tied to the quality of the Centennial Valley swan habitat.

An important population in Montana of Arctic Grayling, a beautiful fish which, like the swans, was also reduced to near extinction in the 1900s, also lives in the valley. In recent decades there have been several efforts to list the grayling as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. During the past three years, TTSS became concerned when grayling biologists proposed management actions in the Centennial Valley that would have negatively impacted swans.

We set out to better understand the historic causes of grayling decline in the valley. Our ultimate goal was to work with fish managers to design effective Arctic Grayling conservation actions and minimize negative impacts to swans.

Over the past three years, Ruth Shea (TTSS Greater Yellowstone Coordinator) worked with Jim Roscoe (High Divide Consulting) and Bill West (manager of Red Rock Lakes NWR) to research the history of grayling decline in the valley. They found scores of old documents, some dating back to the 1880s. These documents contained previously unknown details about the grayling. Using this fascinating information, they were able to document the original occurrence and destruction of this native fish.

Their research found that construction of Lima Dam in 1909, decades of unscreened irrigation diversions, heavy stocking of non-native fish, over-fishing, and severe drought led to the near-extinction of Arctic Grayling in the Centennial Valley by the 1930s.

During this research, TTSS documented the conservation importance of an additional 14 populations of grayling that were stocked into Montana lakes during the 1900s. Much of the information that we assembled was submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2014. The previously unrecognized conservation value of the stocked populations played a significant role in the Service’s 2014 decision that listing of Arctic Grayling was not warranted.

In March 2015, Ruth presented a small portion of the historic information to current grayling managers. She reports that many were amazed at the previously unknown details that had been discovered. Currently our goal is to work with grayling managers to summarize the historic information effectively. This new information is leading to better understanding of the problems faced by grayling and enabling fish and waterfowl managers to work more effectively to benefit both species.
How TTSS’s grayling research has helped Red Rock Lakes NWR
By Bill West, Program Leader, Red Rocks Lake NWR

The effort by TTSS to look at the ecological history of the Arctic Grayling helped the grayling too.

An important piece of information found in the search through archives of the US Fish Commission was that duck hunters had diverted Elk Springs Creek from its historic channel into a manmade channel leading to Swan Lake, as early as 1908. That diversion blocked grayling spawning migrations upstream on Elk Springs Creek. The Red Rock Lakes NWR plans to restore the creek back to its historic channel with careful consideration to waterfowl and swans.

Swan Lake was always a part of the landscape prior to the duck hunter diversion, but no one in today’s generation knew the channel had been diverted until the historical research revealed in archival documents. In 1908 no one knew enough about grayling to understand the channel’s diversion was a key reason adult Arctic Grayling stopped spawning in that creek over 100 years ago.

Thirty million grayling eggs were taken from Elk Springs Creek by the US Fish Commission from 1898 to 1908 during early efforts by the United States to save the fish from extinction.

While grayling conservation has progressed at the Refuge, Trumpeter Swans have also done really well. They have exceeded population goals in 2013, 2014, and 2015 for the Rocky Mountain Population in the Pacific Flyway plan and the Refuge’s 15-year Comprehensive Conservation Plan. In fact, there has been a steady increase in the number of Trumpeter Swans in the Centennial Valley since the mid-1990s.

Left: Just visible in the waters of Widgeon Pond is a family of Trumpeter Swans. As of July 31, 2015, there were at least 20 nests at the Refuge. Bill West reported 52 cygnets in the Centennial Valley and 185 adult swans. Photo by Margaret Smith

The 61,000 acre Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge protects the largest wetland complex in the 18 million acre Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, an area the size of West Virginia and one of the largest relatively intact temperate zone ecosystems left on earth.

Right: Elk Springs Creek. The springs feeding the creek are located just above the yellow circle

Bill West reports, “We removed a road and a culvert blocking fish passage (yellow circle) and the outline of MacDonald Pond after it was drained and the creek began to find its old channel and restore. MacDonald dam was a fish passage blocking grayling from accessing Elk Springs.

Photo courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service
2015 Board of Directors and other updates

TTSS welcomes Deborah Groves to our Board of Directors. Deborah Groves works as a wildlife biologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Division of Migratory Bird Management. In 1989 she was hired by USFWS in Juneau, first as a technician and later as a wildlife biologist. For the past 25 years, the focus of her work has been on monitoring the abundance and distribution of waterfowl populations in Alaska, especially through aerial surveys. She has spent countless hours in the air counting birds, “including many, many Trumpeter Swans.” Since 2007 she has assumed the lead role coordinating and implementing statewide Alaska Trumpeter Swan surveys. More recently, her coordination role expanded to include the 2010 and 2015 quinquennial North American Trumpeter Swan Surveys.

Ruth Shea ended her board service at the completion of her term after many years of dedicated service on the Board of Directors. Ruth served for nine years as TTSS’s first Executive Director and as Treasurer and Board member for many years. She has made an indelible impact on TTSS and Trumpeter Swan conservation. Ruth continues as TTSS’s Greater Yellowstone Coordinator. Thank you, Ruth, for all you have done as a TTSS leader over these many years!

The Board of Directors elected the following Directors as the 2015 Executive Committee:
Carey Smith, President
Dave Hoffman, Vice President
David Myers, Treasurer
Gary Ivey, Past President
Jeff Nelson, Director at Large
Sara Street, Director at Large

TTSS says farewell and thank you to Martha Jordan who served as the Washington Swan Stewards Chair for many years. Martha was a long-time TTSS Director and initiated TTSS Washington Swan Stewards. Her passion and commitment to swans will continue as she works with another nonprofit in the Washington area. We wish Martha well in her new adventures!

An update to the April 2015 story of Ontario swan L95

In the April 2015 Trumpetings, we shared a story about female Ontario Swan L95, hatched in 2012. This pioneering swan had migrated for two winters from Ontario, Canada into the northern United States.

In March, she was hit by a car as she migrated through Pennsylvania. L95 was taken to the Center Wildlife Care in Lemont with a broken foot. She was found to be suffering from lead poisoning. The Centre featured her story in a “Wildlife Wednesday” television newscast. From that newscast, her story was shared on social media. This swan has a special backstory. She had been “adopted” and named “Ava” by an Ontario family in memory of their little baby girl they lost to cancer.

We are happy to report this special swan recovered from her injuries and lead poisoning and was successfully released into the wild in July. She has been seen in the wild since the release and is doing well.

Ontario Swan L95 began lead treatment in Lemont, Pennsylvania after being hit by a car and subsequently discovered to have lead poisoning. Photo courtesy of Centre Wildlife Care, Lemont, Pennsylvania
Welcome new 2015 members; Memorials & Tributes

Canada
Manitoba: Linda Alguire—Woodridge

United States
California: Robert & Anasthasia Krieger—Riverside
          Frederic Reid—Shingle Springs
Colorado: Ralph Morgenweck—Littleton
Illinois: William Hancock — Minonk
Iowa: Holly Felson Welch — Clive
Minnesota: Shirley de la Torre — Stillwater
          Cathy Gagliardi — St. Paul
          Jim Goodland — Rogers
          Three Rivers Park District, John Moriarty — Plymouth
          Scott Sorensen — Squaw Lake
          Patty Strand — Walker
Montana: Mark & Angie Wagner — Browning
Ohio: Ken Ricer— Akron
Washington: Keith Abel— Snohomish
          Jill Johnstone — Camano Island
          Theresa Simendinger — Friday Harbor
          Michael Smith— Bellevue
Wisconsin: Eagle Optics— Middleton

Memorial and Tributes
For: Jennifer Bard
From: GoFundMe J.Bard campaign

By including TTSS in your will, you are leaving a legacy for Trumpeter Swans for generations.

I support Trumpeter Swan conservation.
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OR donate online at www.trumpeterswansociety.org
For all you do for Trumpeter Swans, thank you.

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

In This Issue:
- A visit to Red Rock Lakes NWR.
- Arctic Graylings & the Centennial Valley.
- How TTSS grayling research has helped Red Rock Lakes NWR.
- 2015 Board of Directors & other updates.
- Update to story of Ontario swan L95.
- Welcome new members!

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Red Rock Lakes NWR worked with TTSS to manage habitat for both Trumpeter Swans and Arctic Grayling fish. Read more pages 8-9.

TRUMPETERS EDITORS
John Cornely, Gary Ivey, Margaret Smith

Go to www.trumpeterswansociety.org for a listing of the Board of Directors and Staff