



## **THE TRUMPETER SWAN SOCIETY**

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### **How Minnesota brought back the Trumpeter Swan**

The story of Minnesota's amazing Trumpeter Swan restoration is filled with partnerships, adventure, and educational leadership. The restoration's success is the combined efforts of a park district, a state agency, and the scientific expertise and "swan network" of The Trumpeter Swan Society.

Minnesota's swan's success story actually begins in the 1960s when Bob Burwell, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director in Minneapolis/St. Paul, suggested to Fred King, Chairman of Minnesota's Hennepin County Park Reserve Board of Commissioners, that restoration of Trumpeter Swans would help increase the visibility of Hennepin County's parks (today, Hennepin County Parks is known as Three Rivers Park District).

In the 1960s, Hennepin County Parks began its first efforts at restoring Trumpeters by using young Trumpeter Swans brought in from Montana's Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. The Greater Yellowstone region was home to the lone remnant of Trumpeters remaining in the lower 48 states- in the 1930s, less than 100 Trumpeters were discovered there near the remote thermal pools of the Yellowstone region.

However, mortality of the first swans released in Minnesota was high. Hennepin County Parks decided to use the remaining swans to start a captive propagation program to raise swans for future releases.

There were many unknowns about how to restore a species that was nearly extinct. Hennepin County Parks created The Trumpeter Swan Society (TTSS) ([www.trumpeterswansociety.org](http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org)) to bring together the continent's best known scientific and breeding information about Trumpeter Swans. TTSS has remained critically important in smoothing the "flight to success" of restoring swans over the past several decades as different states begin their own restoration programs. In 1969, TTSS held the first of its twenty-three biennial conferences which, to this day, remains the single best source of scientific swan research in North America.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Hennepin County Parks began its restoration in its Park Reserves in the east-central region of the state, which contains shallow marshes. A decade later, in the 1980s, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) joined the effort to

restore Trumpeters to the northwest part of the state. The MN DNR flew to Alaska to obtain most of its eggs, which were hatched in incubators and the cygnets raised by State employees.

Behind the scenes was TTSS whose swan expertise, relationships with biologists, and networks with the Flyway Councils where bird management decisions are made, helped in reducing potential failures.

Minnesota is unique, because the amazing numbers of Trumpeter Swans that are seen today are the result of efforts by both the MN DNR and Three Rivers Park District, using the expert knowledge of biologists at TTSS, who brought Trumpeter Swans to different parts of the state.

Not only are Trumpeters breeding and nesting across Minnesota, they can be seen during the winter as well as on open rivers. People can see wintering swans on the Mississippi River at Monticello or on the Otter Tail and Pelican Rivers.

Today we see the blending and growth of a new Minnesota Trumpeter Swan whose great grandparents may have come from Alaska or Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

In May 2015, TTSS helped fund the counting of Minnesota's Trumpeter Swans in a survey conducted by the MN DNR. Minnesota's count will be included in the 2015 count of all North American Trumpeter Swans, organized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The remarkable recovery of Minnesota's swans is part of the larger inspirational story of how a species can return from extinction. TTSS has been part of every major Trumpeter Swan restoration effort on the continent, including Minnesota.

Minnesota is a model of bringing together the right partners, the best technical expertise, and the dedication and passion of individuals, agencies, and organizations to bring back a species which had been gone for over a century. When people in Minnesota see Trumpeter Swans today, they are really seeing inspiration and hope that a species can be restored.