



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## ANNUAL TRUMPETER SWAN CENSUS INDICATES DISPERSAL OF BIRDS

Fewer adult trumpeter swans returned to Red Rock Lakes and Yellowstone Park this year, Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman said today. Even though the production of cygnets was at the same general level of former seasons, the population of trumpeter swans in the United States has moderately declined.

The annual fall census of the trumpeters, made by personnel of the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, showed a population of 376 as compared with 451 recorded in the August 1949 survey. In the area of Yellowstone Park and the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana the count was down by 62 birds. Losses from other areas amounted to 13 swans.

While 16 of the missing trumpeters are known to have died in the United States this past year due to disease, predation, and severe winter storms, other birds, presumably, were killed by curious gunners or died from natural causes. These losses, however, cannot account for all the missing birds.

Service biologists are of the opinion that many of the birds unaccounted for in the 1950 census may have moved to ancient breeding grounds...perhaps farther north. In addition, larger numbers of trumpeters have been seen in recent years on wintering grounds in British Columbia and Southeastern Alaska --- as well as on some areas in the United States, particularly along the Snake River in Idaho. A few swans have been seen on the Kenai National Moose Range, and as many as 350 trumpeters in a single season have been recorded by expert observers in various areas of Southeastern Alaska. Several hundred more trumpeter swans are known to exist in Canada.

Since breeding swans maintain territorial rights in the vicinity of their nests, space and food accommodations for non-breeders is limited. Swans do not breed until five or six years old. The comparatively large numbers of non-nesters must disperse to other suitable habitat when the breeding range is fully occupied. The population of swans at Red Rock Lakes and nearby Yellowstone Park, and along the Snake River, has reached a level--between 325 to 400 birds--which is about the capacity of this nesting habitat.

Efforts on the part of Service biologists to establish some of the surplus birds on other National Wildlife Refuges have as yet met with only limited success. Although trumpeters nested again this year on the National Elk Refuge--near Yellowstone Park--most of the excess population of swans apparently prefer to fly north to re-occupy old trumpeter swan territory, or to join their kind in Alaska and Canada.

At one time the trumpeter ranged all over the West and midwest: California and British Columbia to Manitoba, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri. But because the areas the swans preferred were taken over by civilization, the trumpeter began to decline. In 1935, when only 73 trumpeters remained in the United States, the Red Rock Lakes Refuge was established.

Since evidence indicates the swans are increasing and dispersing, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists believe it possible that some of the more remote wilderness areas in the United States--formerly swan territory--may yet be re-occupied by migrants from the strong breeding nucleus at Red Rock Lakes.

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