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FWS CONTINUES PLANS FOR EXTENDING NESTING AREAS OF TRUMPETER SWAN

An aggressive plan to increase the productivity of the trumpeter swan flock at Red Rock Lakes Migratory Waterfowl Refuge in Montana and at the same time help establish new nesting flocks of trumpeters elsewhere was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton.

The decline in the rate of reproduction at Red Rock Lakes indicates the flock is now in a static condition apparently due to crowding of the range with too many adults and not enough young birds present. Because of this reduced productivity, the removal of 40 swans a year from Red Rock--20 cygnets and 20 non-breeding older birds--is being undertaken in order to relieve the over-crowding of the refuge and to help develop breeding flocks elsewhere.

The cygnets-of-the-year will be captured before they have developed their flight feathers. The non-breeding adults will be taken from Upper Red Rock Lake where this class of trumpeter tends to congregate when they are flightless while moulting. Trumpeter swan pairs are notorious for seeking isolation during nesting time and require about a square mile or more of breeding territory.

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon and Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada, scenes of previous experimental transplanting, will continue to be the sites for swan releases. Malheur will get the 20 cygnets-of-the-year in 1957, while Ruby Lake will receive the 20 adults. In 1958 Malheur will get the 20 adults and Ruby Lake the 20 cygnets. This plan of alternation will continue until one refuge has an established nesting flock, by which time the young-adult swan ratio at Red Rock Lakes Refuge should be improved because of the removals. Results of these introductions will not be immediately apparent, since the trumpeter does not breed until at least 4 or 5 years old.

Of the birds transferred each year, a portion will be rendered flightless, temporarily, by wing-clipping and will be held in an enclosure where they will act as decoys in holding the other birds throughout the winter. Birds which are not wing-clipped will be color-marked so that they may be recognized if they return to Red Rock Lakes Refuge. Feed will be provided all of these birds in open spring-fed ponds throughout the winter.

The fall census showed 588 swans in the American flock at Red Rock and the National Parks and National Forests nearby. There is a Canadian flock in northern Alberta and British Columbia and a third flock in the Copper River country, in Alaska.

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