

A Trumpeter Swan feeds in a soybean field in Illinois in late February 2007.

Photo by Dana Varner



on or near Peabody Coal Company's reclaimed Universal Mine (Universal) that spans the border between Illinois and Indiana, 9 miles east of Paris, Illinois. More than 40% of those swans were neck-collared and 162 collars were identified during that winter. A smaller flock of about 40 uncollared trumpeters was also recorded near the town of Wolf Lake in southern Illinois for most of the winter.

Surveys were conducted from 24 November 2005 – 2 March 2006 to determine habitat use at both BS5 and Riverlands. During that time period over 32 hours of activity time budget observations at BS5 and over 85 hours at Riverlands were made. Preliminary results from this season suggest that habitat used for foraging varied between trumpeters wintering at BS5 and those at Riverlands. Trumpeter Swans at BS5 were observed in wheat fields 14% of the time, while swans were never observed in wheat at Riverlands (See Fig.1). Swans used corn 32% of the time at BS5 and 36% of the time at Riverlands. The activity time budgets showed that swans at Riverlands spent 28% of their time foraging when in corn fields while those at BS5 spent 32% of their time foraging while in crop fields with very little difference between corn and wheat (See Fig. 2). These results imply that corn at both sites and wheat at BS5 make up a substantial part of the winter diet of Trumpeter Swans. Swans at both sites were also seen foraging in aquatic habitats. Seasonal survival estimates for swans wintering at these sites will determine whether differences in the winter diet may be affecting survival rates of swans.

Swans were also observed on the Wisconsin breeding grounds during the summer of 2006. Fifty-one collars were re-sighted from May to August in the central Wisconsin counties of Wood, Juneau, and Jackson. Of those 51 collars, 45 had been seen at BS5

during the previous winter. It appears that the majority of the collared swans wintering at BS5 originated in central Wisconsin. According to banding records, swans at Riverlands during the winter seem to be migrating from northern Wisconsin and those at Universal come mainly from Burnett County in northeastern Wisconsin.

During the winter of 2006-07 populations at all three sites grew. There were over 125 trumpeters at BS5 and over 160 at both Riverlands and Universal. Almost 200 collars were recorded at those three sites. An additional 7 collared birds were found within two small populations of about a dozen each, one near Wolf Lake and the other just east of Harrisburg. Over 75% of the collars seen during the winter of 2005-06 were seen during the winter of 2006-07. Work for the 2006-07 winter season began 26 November and, as of this writing, is in progress. The Riverlands population has been observed foraging in corn and soybean fields while those at BS5 have been using corn, winter wheat, and soybeans thus far. Habitat use surveys and time budgets are also being conducted at Universal. This population has been observed foraging in corn and soybeans to date. Swans at Riverlands and Universal have rarely been observed in winter wheat fields. This is likely due to a lack of suitable winter wheat fields at those sites.

The IP has more than doubled since 2000. Despite this dramatic growth many Trumpeter Swans cannot be considered self-sustaining because they remain in the north during the winter, congregating in a few small areas where they are artificially

provided with food. Our project will help determine whether winter feeding is needed to maintain the population or should be discontinued to encourage swans to migrate to more southerly habitats. This will demonstrate the value of maintaining habitat for wintering trumpeter swans in Illinois and other southern states. Our project will also help wildlife managers to determine whether current winter habitat conditions in Illinois are adequate to supply nutritional requirements of the objective swan populations.

Reports of collared Trumpeter Swans, whether recent or not, in Illinois, Wisconsin, and surrounding states are greatly appreciated. Please e-mail DanaVarner@hotmail.com or call (618) 453-6947 or (866) 401-5673 if you have any information.

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