

Pair of Trumpeter Swans
at Lake Katherine, Palos
region, Cook County.
3 April 2005.

This pair was likely the same
pair that also visited McGinnis
Slough nearby that year.
Photo by Paul Dacko.



Swans at the end of summer. No other swan species would be in Illinois during that time. Marquette's writings make it clear that swans nested in abundance on his journey in the river valleys and backwater marshes of Illinois, and his travels took him very near where the Trumpeter Swans nested in 2006.

A trading trip to Illinois was made in 1710 by a man named Kellogg. His party reached the Illinois River by way of the Chicago River and wrote that they had seen an 'infinite number of wild fowl, such as Cranes, Geese, Duck and Swans' and that they were feeding on wild oats and ripe plums (Schorger 1964). "Since the plums were edible, the time was the last of August or early September. No migratory swans would arrive near Chicago this early so that they must have been resident Trumpeters," wrote Schorger.

Other indications that Trumpeter Swans historically nested in Illinois include Parmalee's (1958) account of the discovery of 375 Trumpeter Swan bones in pre-1600 Indian burial sites

in Will, St. Clair and Calhoun counties. Indians obtained Trumpeter Swans for food and ornaments when the species became flightless while molting from late June to mid-August (Bohlen 1989). However, it is possible these bones could have been traded between tribes in other regions.

Schorger (1964) also recounts an 1870 northwest Indiana nesting and an 1893 south-central Wisconsin nesting, roughly 50 miles from Rockford, Illinois. The last time a Trumpeter Swan was confirmed nesting in Illinois remains in question. Recent reports in the Chicago Tribune and Brookfield Zoo press releases indicating a trumpeter nested in Glenview in the 1840s are inaccurate – no documentation can be found

pointing to these statements. The safest, most accurate statement is that Trumpeter Swans were likely extirpated as a breeder in Illinois by the 1880s (Bohlen 1989).

The Carroll County family of 2006 left their marsh 22 October 2006, and moved in mid-November to Lower Spring Lake, roughly two miles south from their breeding site. Since these swans are loyal to their successful nest sites and have life expectancies nearing three decades, it's easy to see a bright future for this pair with their nesting site potentially becoming the epicenter of an increasing Illinois breeding population. The chances are great for a growing breeding population of Trumpeter Swans in Illinois. Indeed, the pair returned to the same nesting site by roughly 20 May 2007. And Anne Straight reported that the Trumpeter Swan male (1H9) and female (OC6) had four cygnets 6 June 2007 at the same location they bred in 2006. On 14 June 2007, as this article went to press, two adults remained sentinel on either side of the four cygnets as the youngsters fed for at least 30 minutes (pers. comm. S. Bailey).

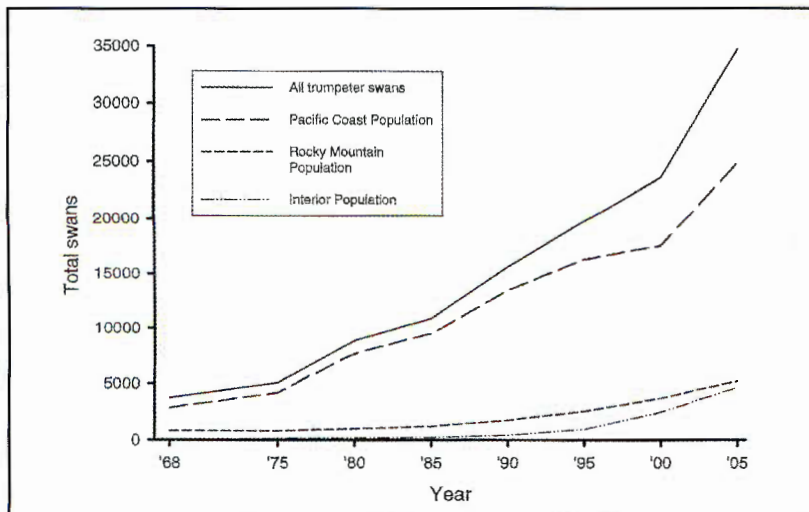


Figure 1. Total North American and population-specific trumpeter swan abundance estimates resulting from quinquennial trumpeter swan surveys, 1968-2005. Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.