



Trumpeter Swans in Ontario 2007-2008

By Harry Lumsden June 2009

From 1 Sept 2007 to 31 August 2008, 116 swans were banded and marked with yellow wing tags in Ontario. A total of 95 were caught by hand at LaSalle Park and at the western end of Lake Ontario by Bev and Ray Kingdon, Julie Kee and Kyna Intini. The peak of numbers in this park in January 2008 was 160 Trumpeters and about 100 Mute Swans. Trumpeters were marked elsewhere along the coast of Lake Ontario at Bluffer's Park, Frenchman's Bay and Whitby Harbour as well as at Wye Marsh and other places where they congregated.

Reports of the numbers on these wing tags provided by members of the public showed movements, range extensions and increases in density in the Province.

Swans were fed corn and some bread at most of these trapping sites and soon learned to take food from the hand. If fed in shallow water, they could be caught when their heads were under the surface. The wing tags were attached to the patagium opposite the elbow joint, about 1.0 to 1.5 cms from the tendon on the leading edge of the wing. An applicator used for attaching tags to the ears of cattle was used.

Observers are very conscientious in reporting tag markers and 300 to 360 different numbers are seen each year. A comparison of numbers reported in succeeding years suggests that only 7-12% of the marked birds known to be alive are missed each year.

Observers across southern Ontario are asked to report the composition of flocks of Trumpeters seen through fall and winter. This includes the number of tagged birds whether the number is read or not, the number of unmarked birds, and the number of cygnets. This provides ratios of marked and unmarked birds and of cygnets, permitting estimation of total numbers. In 2007-08, observers reported 1213 swans in 223 groups. Margaret Whitten at Wye Marsh has been remarkably conscientious in collecting such data and relaying to us.

In 2007-08, 364 tagged swans were reported. If we include 9% as a correction for tags of birds estimated to have been missed by observers, marked birds becomes approximately 397.

We calculated the unmarked portion of the population to be 621; thus the total of white swans is $397 + 621 = 1018$. Wild cygnets are not banded until the winter so this total does not include cygnets. These we estimate from the data contained in the group counts. In 2007-08, the groups contained 235 cygnets, which constituted 39% of total. Adding 39% to the estimate of white swans, the total becomes $1018 + 397 = 1415$ Trumpeters.

The Trumpeter Swan population is increasing rapidly. Although we band as many as we can catch, the proportion of tagged/untagged birds has been steadily declining. We estimate that in 2005 54% were marked; in 2006 46%; in 2007 44%; and in 2008 39%. The increase in wild production is substantial and accounts for this reduction.

