



Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council

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Trumpeter Swan Flight Survey Summary Report

Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council

July 24, 2010



Introduction / Purpose:

The Trumpeter swan was extirpated from Eastern Canada over 200 years ago. In the early 1980s, under the careful direction of Biologist Harry Lumsden, a reintroduction program was commenced in cooperation with the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre near Midland, Ontario. The program has proven to be immensely successful; the Ontario population now exceeds over 1000 birds.

Trumpeter swans migrate south to over-winter with a mixture of some birds staying on the north shore of Lake Ontario while others head further south. They migrate north in the spring for nesting and raising their broods in shallow marshes and beaver ponds. Surprisingly though – exactly where many of them go in south-central Ontario to nest is a mystery. An extensive network of volunteers track the movements of swans in the Severn Sound area. Intermittent and scattered reports are received of swans further north into the Parry Sound and North Bay areas. However, these reports only account for a small fraction known to migrate into south-central Ontario.

One of the primary purposes of this flight was to investigate if Trumpeters were selecting isolated and secluded wetlands and beaver ponds throughout the southern portion of the Parry Sound Area (extending from Severn Sound to Parry Sound) for nesting. The presence of adult birds or adults with cygnets (swans born this spring) could be used as an indicator of likely near-by nesting activity.

On July 21, 2010 the Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council (EGBSC) coordinated an exploratory flight for the purpose of sighting adult trumpeter swans and cygnets (sub-adult birds).

Methods:

A Cessna 180 fixed-wing, float plane from Georgian Bay Airways based out of Parry Sound was used for the survey. Flight altitude was 1300 – 1400 feet above ground level. Visibility was satisfactory throughout the flight. Some degradation in viewing vigilance was present due to air sickness, or steps taken to mitigate air sickness amongst observers. This occurred during the second half of the flight after covering the Severn Sound area.

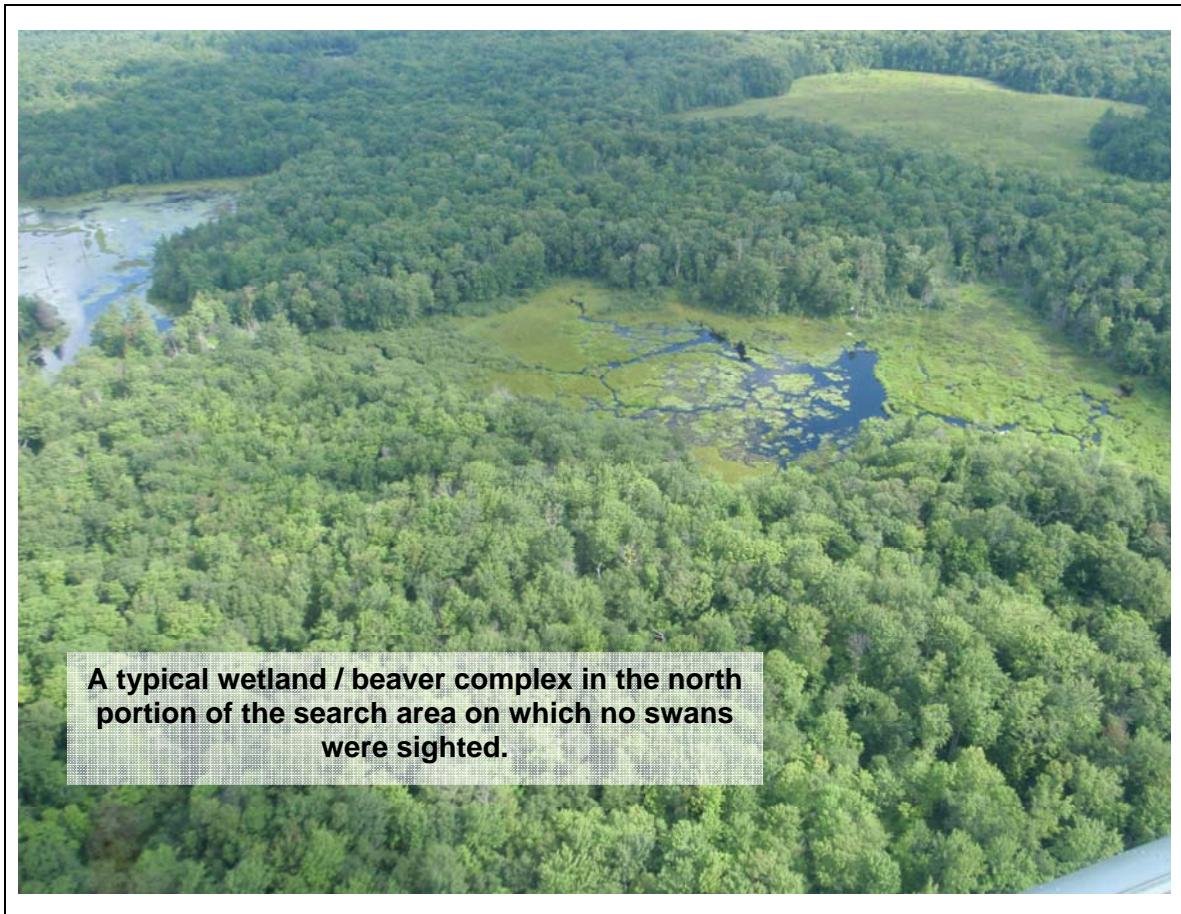
Three observers were on board: Sara Street of the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, Tom Hince a contract worker with the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve and Eric McIntyre with the Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council. The pilot – James Ferguson, also assisted with sighting birds.

The search area was loosely bounded by Parry Sound to the north, the open waters of Georgian Bay to the west, the southern shore of Severn Sound to the south, and a combination of the CPR rail line in the south-eastern portion and Hwy 400 in the north-eastern portion to the east. A reasonable approximation of the flight line is shown in Figure 1.

- 4 in Matchedash Bay
- 2 in the North River in the vicinity of Lovering
- 2 in Gloucester Pool and
- 2 in an unnamed wetland just east of Gibson Lake.

No cygnets were observed.

Many wetlands and beaver complexes providing suitable nesting habitat were observed north of the above noted areas (see Figure 2) – but no swans were sighted.



A typical wetland / beaver complex in the north portion of the search area on which no swans were sighted.

Acknowledgements:

We wish to gratefully thank Mr. Harry Lumsden, Trumpeter Swan re-introduction Biologist, for allowing our Council to participate in this excellent wildlife management project. Funding for this project has been provided by the Amherst Wildlife Foundation.

Special thanks to Sara Street and Tom Hince who participated as observers under trying flight conditions.

Also, thanks to James Ferguson, Georgian Bay Airways pilot for a safe flight and making passengers as comfortable as possible.