

Back in the Ecosystem: The Return of Trumpeter Swans



[Ensuring the Continuing Existence of Wild Trumpeter Swans in Ontario for Generations to Come.](#)

The story of Ontario's Trumpeter Swans begins with the tragedy of their extirpation in Ontario by the end of the 19th century. The introduction of guns accelerated the increased hunting pressure by humans on the population. Demand for their feathers, skins and meat brings the existence of the Trumpeter Swan in Ontario to a close in 1886 when the last reported Trumpeter Swan is shot at Long Point, Lake Erie. By 1932, surveys reported the North American population were in a critical state with only small pocketed populations totaling 69 swans in North America. These swans were only saved from extinction due to the introduction and protection of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. In the 1930's conservation and early restoration efforts began to save the critically endangered populations and their habitats. By the 1950's positive population growth resulted from these conservation efforts. In the mid 1950's there was a discovery of a previously unknown breeding population of Trumpeters in Alaska and Western Canada. These Alaskan Trumpeters would eventually help build the foundation for the Trumpeters in Ontario and provide genetic diversity to the restored population. Fast Forward to 1982 when Ontario joins the restoration efforts.

Retired MNR biologist Harry G. Lumsden, spearheads the Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program. The objective is to restore the Trumpeter Swan in Ontario to its former range. Breeding pairs are purchased from other programs and 50 Alaskan eggs are collected in conjunction with US Fish and Wildlife Services. Funding comes from 94 different foundations, businesses, and individuals. Partnerships are founded with cooperators who volunteered to host captive breeding pairs and raise cygnets in large ponds on their properties. Cygnets would then be given to the restoration program for later release. It would take at least 4 years for the cygnets to be old enough to mate. Over the years, 574 captive reared swans are released into the wild in over 50 different locations throughout the province. Historical data collected provided the evidence required for selecting key release sites. One of the largest release sites was the Wye Marsh in Midland, Ontario. The coastal Georgian Bay wetlands would provide extensive pristine habitat for the swans.

1988, the Wye Marsh received their first captive breeding pair from the Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration program. In 1993 a milestone is reached in the program, one of their offspring successfully nested at the marsh. This swan known as "Pig Pen" would be the first wild Trumpeter Swan known to naturally nest in the Ontario wild in over 100 years. Pig Pen went on to produce 70+ wild descendants.

The Riverdale Horticultural Society would like to thank Donna Lewis for her informative, and inspirational presentation on the return of the Trumpeter Swans on December 14, 2022.

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To measure the success of the reintroduction, Lumsden and his team applied leg bands and yellow wing markers to as many of the swans as possible. The program has marked 2,500+ swans over the past 30 years. Marking the swans enables the program to track and collect population statistics on the swans and their descendants. To date, with the assistance of volunteers and public reports the program has collected over 294,000 sighting reports for Ontario's Trumpeters. Web based tools like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Ebird, and INaturalist have given momentum to the number of sightings that are now coming in annually. Today, the program has come a long way, from 1990 with only 300 sighting reports for 24 swans in 30 locations to 2021 when we recorded over 32,000 sightings, encompassing 800 marked swans, to be seen in 2,600 unique locations throughout Ontario, plus, 32 Ontario tagged swans were reported at 35 unique locations within the USA. In 1990, there is no wild nesting swans in Ontario, 2021 figures recorded 155 known nesting pairs, producing 528 hatched cygnets of which 318 cygnets were known to have fledged. This did not all happen by chance. A small group of dedicated volunteers from the first days of the restoration program to the continuing efforts of today are all part of our team. Countless hours have been spent to observe, band, rescue, report, record, and raise awareness by educating people about Ontario's Trumpeter Swans. What has been accomplished today could not have been done without the teams dedicated support and the assistance of the generosity of the general public. People can make a difference.

Excerpt from:

<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/trumpeter-swan-conservation-ontario/>

Donations can be made to:

Trumpeter Swan Conservation Ontario
2561 The Birches
Washago, Ontario
L0K 2B0

Or online @ [CanadaHelps](https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/trumpeter-swan-conservation-ontario/)

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