

## “Susan, how does Game and Fish survey trumpeter swans, and why do we count them?”

By Susan Patla  
*Nongame Biologist*

The trumpeter swan is one of Wyoming’s most beautiful birds, but it may not be one you see very often. “Waterfowl” are what we call bird species that live in, on, and around water, including ducks, geese, and swans. The trumpeter swan is the largest waterfowl in North America with a wingspan of over 7 feet.

In the early 1900s, people thought it was almost extinct, except for a small group of birds in the Yellowstone area. If an animal species is extinct, it means that they do not exist in the wild anymore. Swans were killed by early settlers and fur trappers for their skin and meat. Thankfully, trumpeter swans did not go extinct, but they do have a small population in Wyoming that depend on shallow water wetland habitats to live. Because of this, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and our partners work hard to conserve trumpeter swans and their habitat.

To track the population of trumpeter swans that live in Wyoming, the Game and Fish wildlife managers count how many trumpeter swans they can see from a small airplane. The count happens in May, July and September in western Wyoming. These survey flights tell the biologists how many nests the trumpeter swans have made, how many baby swans have hatched, and then how many of those baby swans grow up and learn to fly. Idaho and Montana do similar surveys in the parts of their states that surround Yellowstone National Park as well. All three states work together to make



*Wyoming Game and Fish Department biologist Susan Patla with a trumpeter swan. (Photo by Mark Gocke)*

sure a healthy population of trumpeter swans are living in the Yellowstone area. They also work together to make sure swans have enough wetland habitat to keep their population numbers healthy moving into the future.

Last year, in the fall of 2016, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department counted a total of 213 adults and 61 cygnets (which are what we call young swans) for a total of 274 swans in Wyoming outside of Yellowstone National Park. That is the highest number of adult trumpeter swans ever recorded in Wyoming! This is a result of years

of work to move swans and build wetland habitat in the Green River area that began in the 1990’s.

There are four to five times more swans in Wyoming in the winter compared to summer. Starting in November, trumpeter swans fly into Wyoming from Canada as they travel south on their winter migration route. Right now is an excellent time to go out and look for a trumpeter swan in the Jackson and Pinedale areas. You might see a pair with young, in fact! By early November you might be able to see swans in other areas of the state.