

FAMILY SUPPLEMENT

SWAN SONG

Beauty, grace and peace. Few wild creatures have been associated with these qualities as often as the swan. The white-feathered bird, slender neck erect, projects a sense of perfection unrivalled by its human admirers.

With such a reputation, why was the Trumpeter Swan hunted to the point of extinction in Ontario? Unfortunately, beauty was not enough to save it from exploitation and eventual disaster. Although records are incomplete, it is believed that in the 16-1700's, Trumpeter Swans were distributed nearly across North America, including a sizeable Ontario population. However, by the mid-1700's swan numbers fell dramatically, especially in the eastern portion of their range. Archeological evidence, such as piles of Trumpeter bones, appears to confirm that these swans were a significant food source for early missionaries, settlers and Indians. The replacement of bows and arrows by rifles also contributed to the population decline, by enabling natives to greatly increase their take of swans. In addition to food, Trumpeter Swans were prized for their skin and feathers which were made into commercial items such as powder puffs and pen quills.

This heavy hunting pressure far exceeded natural reproduction, and the population collapsed. By the late 1800's the last Trumpeter Swan had been killed in Ontario. Since 1916, this species has been protected from hunting in all parts of Canada, the United States and Mexico under the Migratory Birds Convention Act. But the legislation came too late. The original tens of thousands of Trumpeters native to Canada had been reduced to an estimated 380 by 1981, concentrated in the western provinces.

But you've seen swans in Ontario? Most likely you have spotted the two other swan species found in this province: the Whistling Swan, a native species, which is very similar in appearance to the Trumpeter; and the Eurasian Mute Swan, an introduced species, recognized by the black knob on its orange bill. (See inside for identification features). Unfortunately, however, in all probability

you have never witnessed the majestic flight of the Trumpeter Swan, nor heard its characteristically deep, trombone-like song over head. Until recently, that opportunity remained only a remote possibility.

In 1982 the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources joined forces to launch a reintroduction of Trumpeter Swans to southern Ontario. Their main objective is to promote a breeding population of Trumpeter Swans in Ontario, and secondarily to prevent the aggressive Mute Swans from dominating available habitat.

The program involves the use of Mute Swans as "foster parents". Trumpeter Swan eggs are transported from Alberta, where a relatively stable population exists, and are placed in the nests of Mute Swans (Mute Swan eggs are removed). The Trumpeter eggs are incubated naturally and the cygnets (young swans) are reared by the "foster mother". In order for the Trumpeter cygnet to recognize another of its own species (and not think of itself as a Mute Swan) it is important that there be at least two Trumpeter cygnets in each Mute Swan nest. When the cygnets mature (3 years) it is hoped that they will return to the nesting area, find a mate, and breed successfully.

This reintroduction effort has met with limited success during the summers of 1982 and 1983. The resulting Trumpeter Swans have been tagged for easy identification in the wild, and these birds are closely watched. Throughout the program, important life history and habitat information has been obtained, all of which may help to improve the success rate of future management efforts. It is the hope of governments and conservationists, alike, that this native species will once again grace our shorelines, allowing future generations to experience the sights and sounds that we have missed.

If you are interested in getting a closer look at this rare swan, visit the Kortright Waterfowl Park at Guelph (see map) where several Trumpeters have been raised.

**The term "swan song" refers to a legend that some swan species sang a unique "song" during their dying breath. In present day use, the term refers to a person's last earthly act, usually a creative one such as a poet's last poem or an actor's last role.*



Beyond the snowy-white feathers and graceful lines of the swan, lies a muscular and well-equipped body. Locomotion, feeding and protection are all critical to a species and like all animals, Trumpeter Swans have specific features which enable them to survive in their habitat.

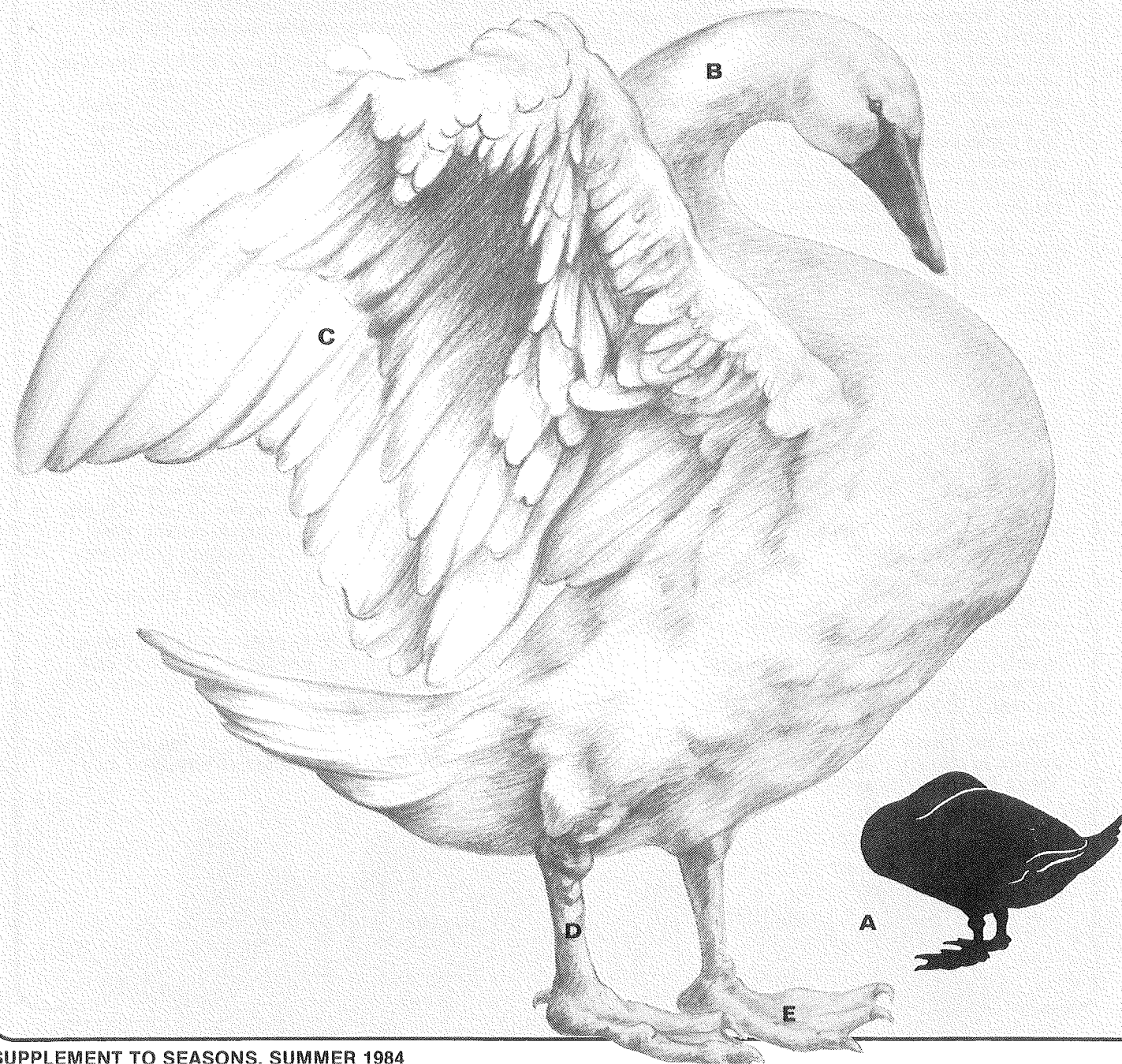
A - when sleeping, the Trumpeter Swan puts its head behind its wings. The air trapped between the wing feathers acts as insulation to protect the bird against cold.

B - the long, slender neck allows it to feed on vegetation up to three feet below the water surface, thus avoiding competition from surface-feeding ducks or deeper diving ducks. The long neck also helps to compensate for the swan's awkwardness on land.

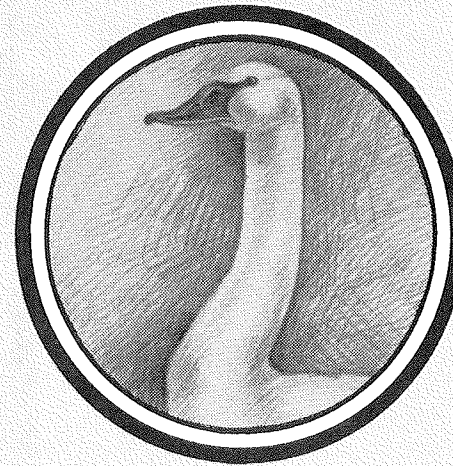
C - the large, powerful wings not only enable the bird to fly long distances at a high speed, but also provide a weapon for defense. Potential threats, such as predators, can be beaten off by flapping the muscular wings against the enemy.

D - the short legs, along with large feet, help to balance the bird as it tips up to feed underwater. The legs are placed relatively far back on the body to improve balance while feeding, however on land, the swan is very awkward.

E - large webbed feet are important for swimming, acting as paddles. When the bird takes off from the water, it "runs" along the surface of the pond in order to gain enough speed to lift its weight into the air.



A Guide to Swan Identification in Ontario

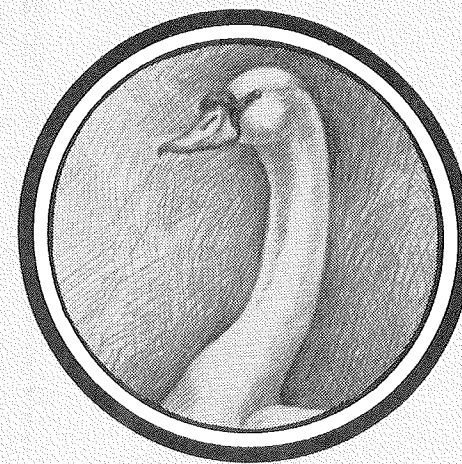
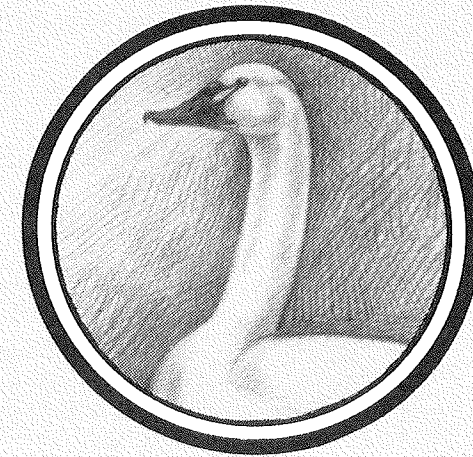


Trumpeter Swan

- largest North American swan
- white feathers
- eyes brown
- average wingspan of 241 cm
- black and dark yellow to black-covered legs and feet
- long, sloping black bill with narrow salmon-red streak on edge

Whistling Swan

- very difficult to distinguish from Trumpeter Swan
- white feathers
- eyes brown
- average wingspan of 216 cm
- black feet
- black bill is sloped slightly more than Trumpeter's
- usually, but not always, has a small yellow or orange patch in front of its eyes

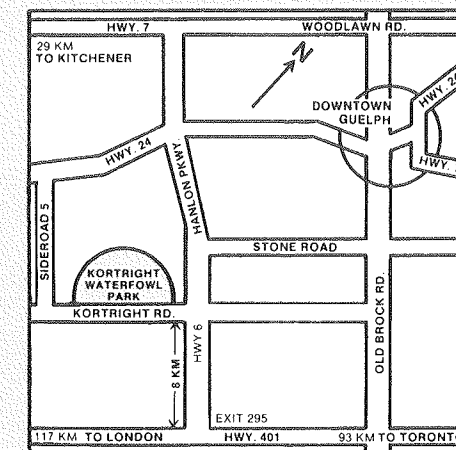


Eurasian Mute Swan

- white feathers
- eyes brown
- prominent black knob on its upper bill
- bill is reddish-orange with black nostrils and a black tip (nail)
- feet greyish-black

Kortright Waterfowl Park, Guelph

Open 7 days a week, year round, the public can view many species of waterfowl, including Trumpeter Swans. Admission is \$2.00 for adults and \$1.50 for students.



Swan Language

When ornithologists (scientists who study birds) refer to swans, they use special words. A male swan is called a **COB**, a female is known as a **PEN**, and a young swan is called a **CYGNET**. A group of swans is termed a **BEVY**.



Blowing their Horn!

- 1) Trumpeter Swan eggs rank among the largest in the world, averaging 326 g each. Weigh a hen's egg and see how it compares.
- 2) Trumpeters have large, powerful wings which enable these birds to reach speeds of 80 km per hour in flight.
- 3) Trumpeter Swans are the largest of all North American waterfowl, with cobs averaging 11.8 kg.



For More Information:

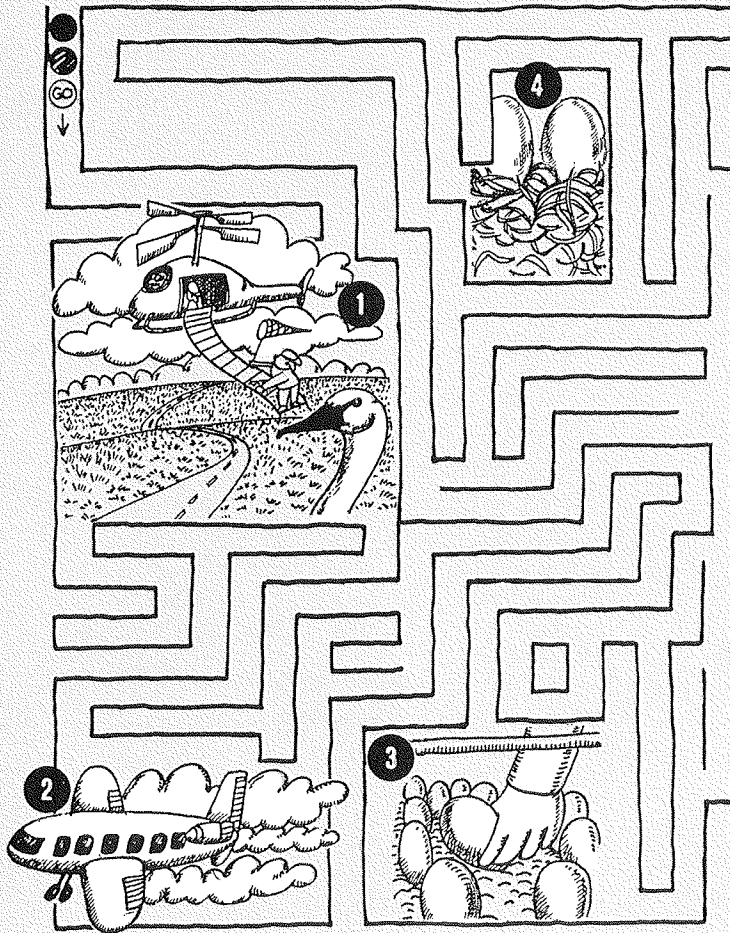
- 1) *Trumpeter Swan and Whistling Swan, Hinterland Who's Who Series*. Available free from:
**Distribution Section
Canadian Wildlife Service
Department of the Environment
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0E7**
- 2) *Birds of Canada*, by W. E. Godfrey, 1966. Available in most libraries.



Answers to Birds of a Feather

- 1) Sedge or Siege
- 2) Murder
- 3) Brace
- 4) Flock or Skain or Gaggle
- 5) Charm
- 6) Covey
- 7) Cast
- 8) Exaltation
- 9) Wing or Congregation
- 10) Spring

aMAZing PUZZLES



Follow the trip of the Trumpeter Swan eggs, from the nests in Grande Prairie, Alberta to the Mute Swan nest at Ontario Place, Toronto.

START

- 1) 16 Trumpeter Swan eggs were collected by helicopter from nests in Grande Prairie, Alberta.
- 2) The eggs were flown by Air Canada to Toronto.
- 3) The eggs were taken to Kortright Waterfowl Park, Guelph and put in an incubator.
- 4) Two eggs were placed in a Mute Swan nest at Ontario Place.

Since the "egg swapping" program began in 1982, five Trumpeter Swans have been successfully reared by Mute Swans.

Birds of a feather

Despite the well known phrase "Birds of a feather **flock** together", there are many different words used to describe a group of birds, depending on the species. Although these special group words are seldom used, they can be a source of amusement and charm in a bird lover's vocabulary.

The following is a list of several different kinds of birds, each with an unusual or interesting group name. How many do you know? (Answers can be found on page 3)

Birds

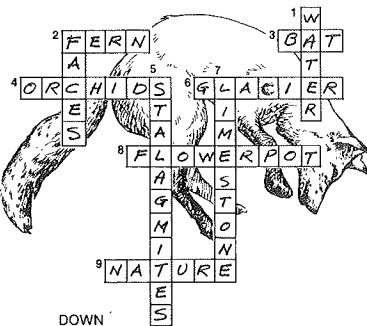
eg. Swans

- 1) Cranes
- 2) Crows
- 3) Ducks
- 4) Geese
- 5) Gold Finches
- 6) Grouse
- 7) Hawks
- 8) Larks
- 9) Plovers
- 10) Teals

Group Name

Bevy

Crossword



ACROSS

2. The unusual walking can be found growing on forested limestone cliffs, in parts of the Bruce Peninsula.
3. The little brown can be found in caves on the cliffs of the Bruce.
4. These spectacular flowers attract thousands of nature photographers and other naturalists to Flowerpot Island and the Bruce Peninsula every year. They grow in wetlands, such as bogs, and some are slipper-shaped.
6. During the last ice age, the Bruce Peninsula was covered by a massive
8. This dramatic pillar of rock was given its name by early pioneers and today has an island named for it.
9. Dorcas Bay and Petrel Point are two F.O.N. reserves on the Bruce.

DOWN

1. The Northern snake is one of the many fascinating reptiles found along the Bruce.
2. Indians saw mysterious "....." in the shapes of the limestone pillars.
5. Small, poorly developed stalactites and can be discovered in caves along the Bruce.
7. Name the type of rock that forms the flowerpots and underlies the Bruce Peninsula.

Answers to last issue's crossword puzzle