

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE
613 Howard Road, West Chester, PA 19380

16 February 2003

Joan Silagy
795 White Oak Lane
Leesport, PA 19533

Dear Joan,

Thank you for submitting documentation of the Trumpeter Swans at Blue Marsh Lake during the winter of 2000-2001.

The Committee has voted to accept the record as to identification, but has placed it in the category of birds that are not considered wild. At some point the Trumpeters being released through introduction projects in various states may develop established breeding populations, and the Committee will continually monitor the species' status.

I might mention that one of the photographs you submitted -- the one viewing the swans from directly over their bills and foreheads -- was particularly interesting. One bird shows the characteristic Trumpeter Swan identification feature of a V-shape where the forehead feathers meet the top of the bill. But the other bird's boundary between the feathers and bill appears to be rounded as a Tundra Swan's would be. Both of these swans are obviously Trumpeters, so this is an excellent example of why a single field mark is usually unsatisfactory for firm identification of any bird.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:
Paul Hess, Chair

Record No. 105-01-2000

P.S. I would like to apologize for the delay in announcing our results. We are striving to process the dozens of documentations we receive each year more quickly.

October 28, 2004

Rudy Keller
71 Lutz Rd
Boyertown PA 19512

Many thanks for submitting the description of the Trumpeter Swan you found on Blue Marsh Lake April 7, 2002. This bird seemed to be a more obvious escape than other records. Regardless, I think PA is on the "brink" of having the species be a regularly occurring visitor. So for the time being the conservative thing to do will be to regard most individuals in the state as coming from one of the re-introduction programs. Short of a banded wild bird records will end up in the dreaded Class V category, a correctly identified record, but the bird may represent an escapee or an introduced species not established in Pennsylvania. However I also think now is the time to compile records of the species so that once the species does become established the decision to include it on the official state list can be based on records of it's occurrence as much as anything else. Without observers submitting documentation to the records committee the occurrence data would be missing. Many thanks for taking the time to write up your observations.

Sincerely

Matt Sharp
Chair: Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee.

105-01-2002

Trumpeter Swan, Blue Marsh, Berks Co.

Date:

Mon, 8 Apr 2002 17:41:51 -0400

From:

Rudy Keller <rkeller@temple.edu>

To:

Nick Pulcinella <nickpul@BELLATLANTIC.NET>, pabirds@list.audubon.org

Joan Silagy already posted that she showed me an imm. Trumpeter Swan at Blue Marsh L. 4/7/02. We initially saw the bird with 2 Canada Geese several hundred feet away across a cove, but Joan knows every deer trail at BML, so she quickly led me to a vantage point only ~ 50 feet from the bird. We watched it for about 15 minutes through our 10X40 bins and at 15-20X through my Kowa scope.

The bird's head, hindneck and back were brownish gray with a few white feathers showing. What we could see on the swimming bird of the lower foreneck, breast, flanks and belly looked white. According to Patten and Heindel in Identifying Trumpeter and Tundra Swans in Birding, Oct. 1994, this alone could rule out imm. Tundra Swan, which completes its molt early and is mostly white by March. However, "Trumpeter Swans have a protracted first pre-basic molt...continuing well into their first spring. Thus, any swan that is obviously dusky in late spring (April and later) is a first-spring Trumpeter..." Would this statement apply if we can't be sure the bird was wild, as in this case?

The bird's head had a long-billed Canvasback-like profile, with a gradual, even slope running from bill tip to the peak of the crown at the back of the head; there was no angle or obvious rounding where bill met forehead, and no obvious dip in the culmen. There was no knob or any other sort of thickening on the bill. The bill was all black except for the red 'lips' or tomium that Joan mentioned. The black skin squarely met the eyes, leaving no "isolated eye" effect as in Tundra Swan. Between the eyes, the forehead feathers formed a deep sharp 'V', not a 'U', at the base of the upper mandible. Through the scope, it was easy to see that the distance from the bill tip to the nostrils was about equal to the distance between the nostrils and the eyes. (According to Patten and Heindel, the distance between nostrils and eyes should be shorter in Tundra Swan.) I thought that the rule of thumb that a Trumpeter's bill length is twice or more the distance from eye to nape also held true. (In Tundra, bill length should be about equal to or 1.5x distance from eye to nape.) The black line running from eye to gape was fairly smooth and direct, with no abrupt angle or curvature just above the gape. The bird held its neck straight (as when we approached too closely) or slightly curved.

The bird stayed in the water while we watched on 4/7, giving only brief, incomplete views of the feet, which were black and apparently unbanded (confirmed by Joan later).

Size was difficult to judge. The swan was much larger than the 2 Canada Geese, but given the great size variability in Canadas, this gives only a rough estimate, and isn't useful in ruling out Tundra. No other swans or geese were close enough for comparison.

Identification seems certain enough to me; origin is another question. The swan stuck close to the Canada Geese at all times. I joked with Joan that they looked like a family group, and wondered who had slipped the swan egg into the goose nest. The bird was also very tolerant of close approach, though it did turn as if to swim away when I approached within about 40 feet. (The geese pretty much

105-01-2002

ignored us, which is typical of Canadas habituated to humans.) I can't imagine a wild Tundra allowing such close approach. But whatever its origin, it gave us an excellent opportunity to study Trumpeter Swan field marks at close range. The only other Trumpeters I've seen well were 'Bob's chickens,' the pair of ad. Trumpeters that spent a few weeks at BML last January, walking twice daily across the ice to eat corn from a bucket Bob held for them.

Rudy Keller
Boyertown, PA
Berks County

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Trumpeter Swan (Cygnus buccinator)

Date of Sighting: 7 April 2002 to 7 April 2002

Location: BLUE MARSH LAKE

County: BERKS

Observer(s): Joan Silagy, Rudy Keller

Date of Submission: 2002

Submitted by: Rudy Keller

Written Description: Yes


Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead							X	
D. Heathcote							X	
P. Hess							X	
J. Stanley			X					
E. Witmer							X	
R. Leberman			X					
M. Sharp							X	
TOTALS			2				5	
DECISION							X	

Comments: 2/5

Signature (Secretary): 

Date: 1/9/03