



Soul of the Bay
GEORGIAN BAY  **TODAY**
NATURE | CULTURE | RECREATION

TRIUMPH OF THE MAJESTIC TRUMPETER

Summer 2019

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Threat of the tenacious Asian carp

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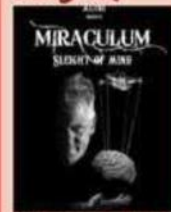
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A hub of culture activities in the Heart of Georgian Bay, the MCC is a community-based, volunteer driven facility where everyone can be involved in artistic and cultural pursuits as a participant or audience member. The MCC is located in the downtown core of Midland.



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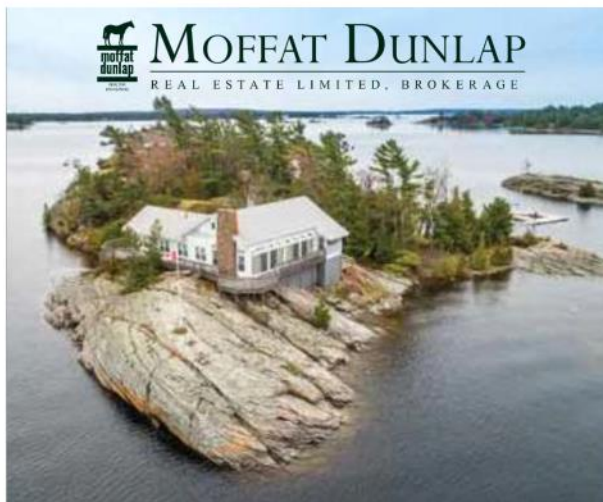
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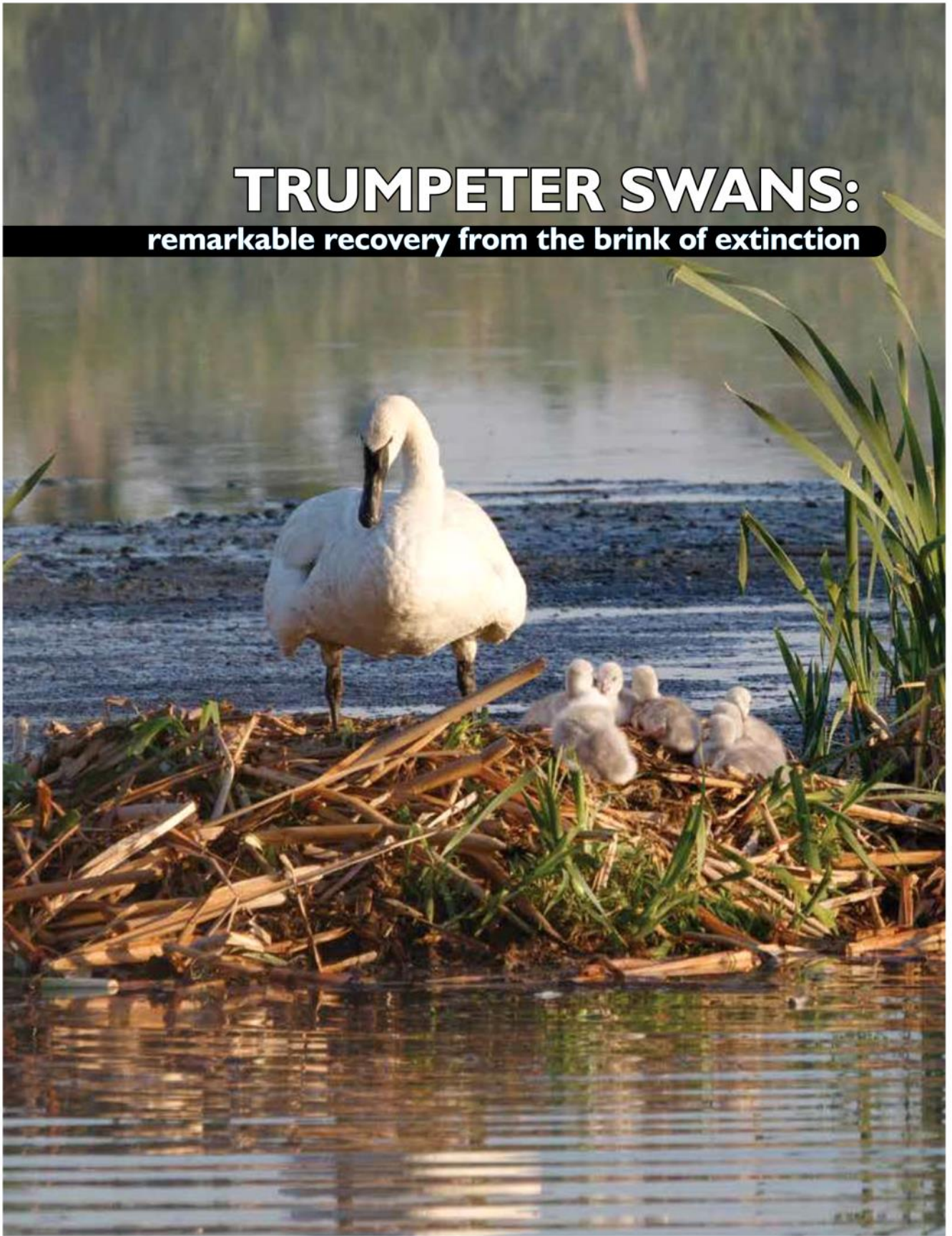
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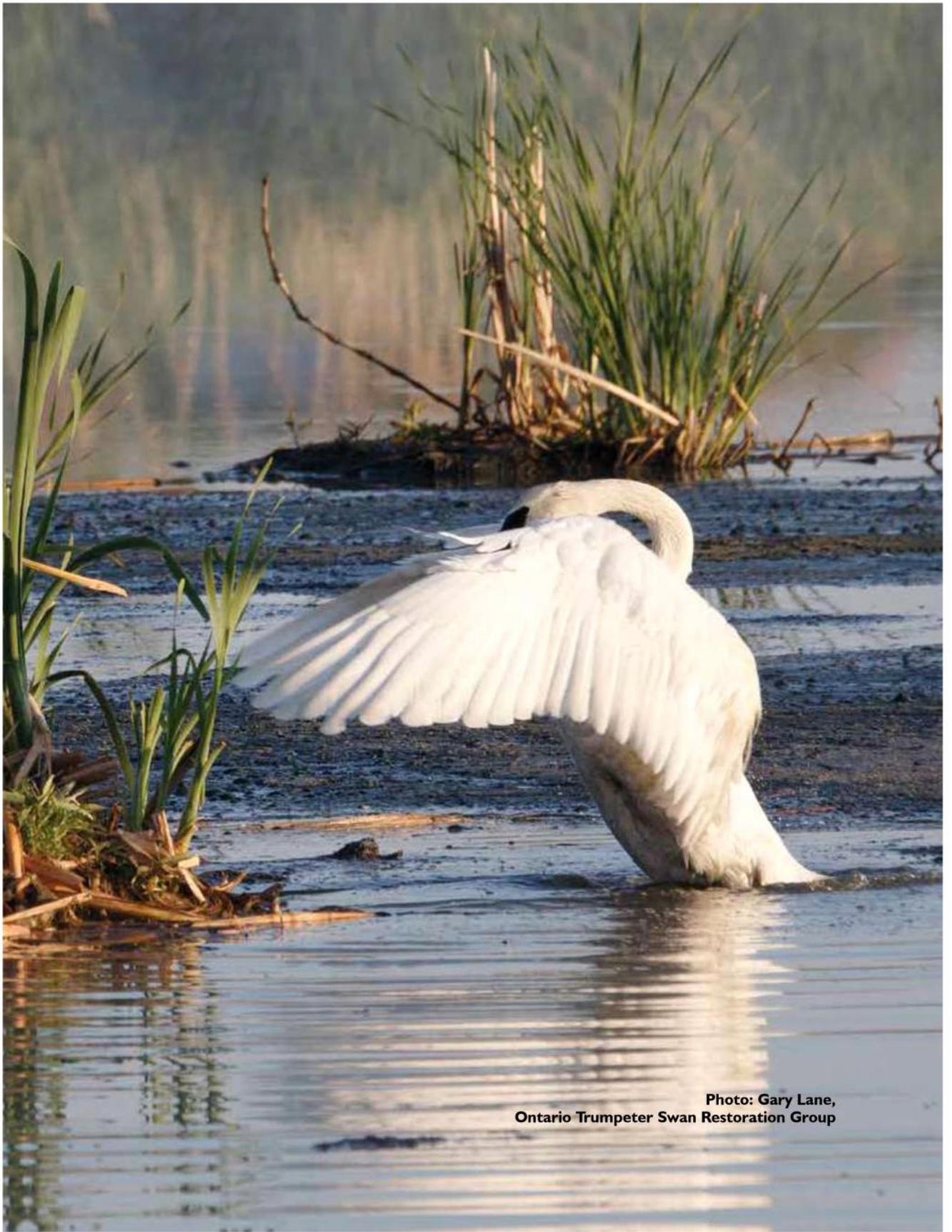
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TRUMPETER SWANS:

remarkable recovery from the brink of extinction





**Photo: Gary Lane,
Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration Group**



Photos: Darrell Richards

The story of Ontario's Trumpeter Swans begins with the tragedy of their extirpation in Ontario

**By Laurel Ironside, Port Severn
Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration**

Humans were to blame. The introduction of guns facilitated increased hunting pressure on the swan population. Demand for their feathers, skins and meat brought their existence in Ontario to a close when the last reported Trumpeter Swan was shot at Long Point,

Lake Erie in 1886. The Trumpeter Swan was extirpated in Ontario.

By 1932, surveys by the National Park Service in the United States reported the North American population was in a critical state with only small-pocketed interior populations totalling 69 swans east of the Pacific range. 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 in the US to save the critically endangered populations and their habitats. By the 1950's, positive population growth resulted from conservation efforts in the United States. In 1959, a previously unknown population of 1200 Trumpeters was discovered in Alaska and Western Canada. These Alaskan Trumpeters helped build the foundation for today, and provided a greater genetic diversity to the restored populations: bigger, stronger, diverse and more productive Trumpeters.



Harry G. Lumsden

**Fast - forward 1982:
Ontario joins the restoration efforts**

Retired Ministry of Natural Resources biologist Harry G. Lumsden, with assistance of the Canadian Wildlife Services and the Trumpeter Swan Society in the U.S., began the Ontario Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program. The objective was to restore the Trumpeter Swan to its former range in Ontario. Breeding pairs were purchased from other programs and 50 Alaskan eggs were collected in conjunction with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Funding came from 94 foundations, businesses and individuals. Partnerships were 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 2 – 6 years for the cygnets to be old enough to mate. Over the years, 574 captive reared swans were released into the wild in 52 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.

In 1988, the Wye Marsh received their first captive breeding pair of Trumpeter Swans. Tragically they lost their breeding female during her first winter there. Another female was placed, they nested and produced cygnets. In 1993, the program reached a milestone; one of their offspring successfully nested at the marsh. This swan, 'Pig Pen' was the first Trumpeter to nest in the wild in Ontario in over 100 years! There are now six generations of wild descendants of Pig Pen (possibly 200). Today, the Wye Marsh has become synonymous with Trumpeters frequently seen inhabiting the shorelines of Georgian Bay.

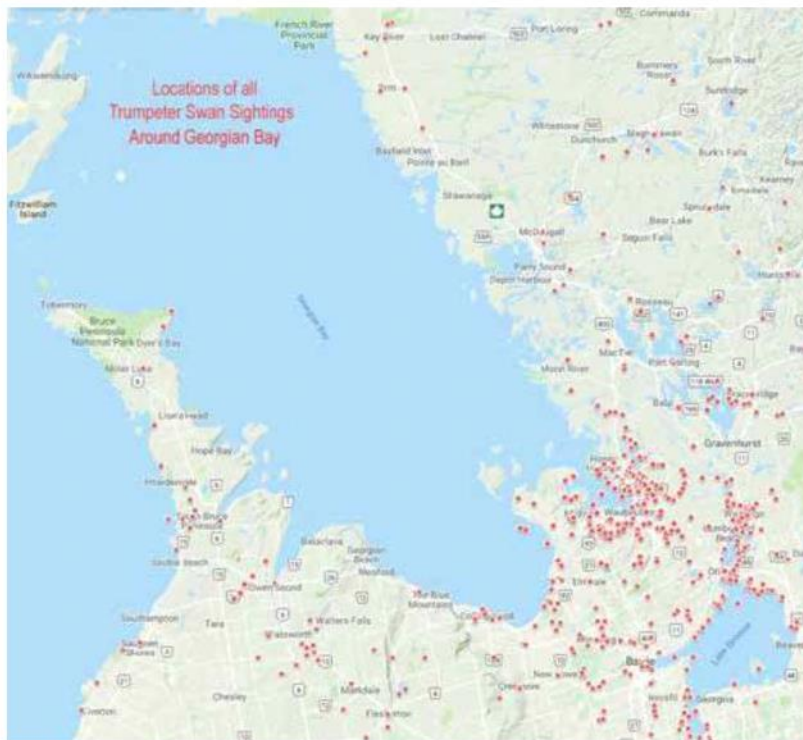
To measure the success of the reintroduction, Lumsden and his team applied leg bands and yellow wing markers to as many of the swans as possible. The programme has marked 2200 swans over the past 30 years. Marking the swans enabled

the programme to track and collect population statistics on the swans and their descendants. To date, with the assistance of volunteers and public reports the programme has collected over 180,000 sighting reports for Ontario's Trumpeters. Web based tools, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Ebird, and INaturalist have given momentum to the number of annual sightings. The programme has come a long way: from 1990 with only 300 sighting reports on 24 swans in 30 locations, to 2018, with over 25,000 sightings, encompassing 670 marked swans, seen in 1049 locations throughout Ontario, plus, 72 swans reported at 217 locations within the U.S. In 1990, there were no wild nesting swans in Ontario. 2018 figures indicate 99 known nesting pairs, producing 227 cygnets to fledge.

This did not happen by chance. It happened because of a small group of dedicated volunteers, from the first days of the restoration program, and others coming later to join the team. Countless hours have been spent to observe, band, rescue, report and raise awareness by educating people about the swans. What has been accomplished today could not have been done without their dedicated support. People can make a difference.

The early years of the restoration program were not without their challenges. Restoring a population of swans absent from the province for 100 years had its learning curves. It would take time to find solutions. Lead Poisoning became a key concern with swan losses; action was needed. Swans were dying after consuming lead shot while naturally foraging. The program joined forces with others and advocates for the ban of lead shot in waterfowl hunting. In 1991, lead shot was banned for migratory bird hunting, but lead poisoning remains one of the biggest concerns to the population; the old residual shot remains in the silty layers of our waters. Today however, more swans die by ingesting fishing tackle containing lead than old shot. Lead fishing gear such as, split shots, sinkers and jig heads resemble the pebbles the swans ingest to help break down food. They cannot tell the difference between a pebble or a lead sinker, they ingest these lead pebbles that gradually dissolve in their system, they suffer a very sad, slow and painful death. People need to work together to eliminate the use of lead fishing tackle.

Other areas of concern are collisions with power lines and vehicles. Unfortunately, illegal hunting of the swans also happens. Sadly, Trumpeters are being shot every year even though they are a protected species. Habitat loss is another frontrunner of concern. Nearly 70% of wetlands have disappeared in southern Ontario due to development. As development moves further north, conservation and protection of natural habitats needs to take centre stage. Trumpeter Swans prefer large marshes and wetland areas abundant with cattail, bulrush and mixed shallow marshy type vegetation.



Red dots indicate reported Trumpeter Swan sightings around Georgian Bay since 1992, courtesy of Gary Lane, Ontario Trumpeter Swan restoration.

The coastal wetlands of Georgian Bay are perfect habitats. Organizations like the Georgian Bay Land Trust are forging the groundwork to protect these habitats. Many known Trumpeter locations are already part of the GBLT protected properties including the Port Severn Wetland, Russell Reserve Lord's Bay, Ingram Biodiversity Reserve in the Honey Harbour/Port Severn area, and other recent acquisitions like the Tadenac Conservation Initiative, just to name a few.

Trumpeters require these large coastal wetland areas to raise their young. Swans require quiet undisturbed habitat away from human interference. Sensitive to movement on the water, most are not tolerant of boat traffic. A simple kayaker is enough to send them into the air. Firecrackers are like gunshots and terrifying to wildlife.

A diet of wild natural forage is essential to the health and sustainability of the Ontario's Trumpeter population. They are a wild, self-sustaining population. They will naturally gravitate to appropriate habitats with plenty of natural forage. Swan parents teach their growing cygnets natural foraging

skills critical to their survival once they are independent of their parents. Summer and fall are the most important foraging seasons for swans, building up their fat stores for insulating, and protecting them during Ontario's winter.

The Trumpeters Swan is North America's largest native waterfowl. With an eight-foot wingspan, their wings can be heard slapping the surface of the water when taking flight, often sounding off their loud, resonating trumpeting call. At one time, biologists estimated there were over 100,000 Trumpeters in Canada west of the Rocky Mountains. Today, North American populations are recovering. In 1968, the North American population was estimated at 2,572. In 2015, the estimated North American population was 63,016. In 2015, Ontario's Trumpeters were estimated at 1,471 and were removed from Ontario's Species of Special Concern List. Their recovery is still sensitive, although considered self-sustaining. We must ensure that what happened to these Majestics so many years ago does not happen again. From their tragic disappearance in Ontario, to the tireless restoration effort, to their trumpeting success of today, we



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must continue to forge forward as guardians of this magnificent species, protecting and preserving them for future generations to behold.

In 2004, Harry G. Lumsden was awarded our country's highest honour for lifetime achievement, membership to the Order of Canada for his leadership and unwavering dedication to the conservation of Ontario's Trumpeter Swans. Ontario



Field Ornithologists honoured him with their Distinguished Ornithologist Award in 2008. In 2012, he received the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement. Congratulations Harry, one man's vision made a difference.

Sightings can be emailed to: trumpeterswans@live.ca or join us on Facebook, "Ontario Trumpeter Swans." 

Bio

Photographer Darrell Richards: hunts with a camera

My inspiration began in 1978 when I read the book A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean by Samuel Hearne (1795). This true story of hardship traversing Canada's barren lands piqued my sense of adventure and, like Hearne, I pursued employment with the Hudson's Bay co. I found myself travelling past 'Prince of Wales fort' (Churchill Man.) posted to the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories, now Nunavut. I spent the next three years developing a real passion for wildlife and landscape photography, using my camera to record the moment as well as convey my insight, as the Inuit culture and wildlife landscape evolved around me.

Today, my passion is to witness and record the beauty of Nature, and to inspire those who view my work to preserve our wildlife and wilderness so our children can witness them in their natural state as well. <http://www.facebook.com/huntswithacamera>
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