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TUNDRA SWANS IN LINCOLN COUNTY, NEBRASKA

On 16 March 1988 Ron Hoffman and I observed nine Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) on a sandpit lake approximately 4 miles east of the I-80 interchange at North Platte. The lake's legal description is T13N, R29W, SW¼ of Section 8. The Swans were reported to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's North Platte office at 10:30 that morning by a former resident of Nebraska's Sandhill region. He thought the Swans looked identical to Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) he had observed while living on a ranch near Hyannis. While leading us to the lake he mentioned that the nine Swans had been using the sandpit for nearly a week, and had been feeding in a nearby picked cornfield.

Immediately upon arriving at the lake we identified the nine birds as Swans by their large size, snowy white body plumage, long necks held nearly vertically erect, and dark, broad bills held horizontally. Five of the Swans were adults, as indicated by black bills, snowy white face, head, and neck plumage, and slightly larger body size. Four of the Swans were immatures as indicated by smokey greyish-brown feathers along the back and sides of the neck and the cheek and crown areas.

All nine birds were swimming deliberately broadside to our observation point, then gradually swam away from us. We could not see the legs and feet to note coloration, but were able to notice that the immatures' bill color

was not the pinkish color of younger immatures, but was the uniform gray-black color characteristic of late winter/early spring juvenile plumage (Bellrose 1980). The birds were silent throughout our observation.

These Tundra Swans were distinguished from Trumpeter Swans by conspicuous canary yellow spots near the base of their bills, just anterior to their eyes. They were distinguished from Mute Swans by their erect neck posture and lack of yellow bill.

Weather conditions at 11:00 AM included a cloudy sky (3,000 foot ceiling at Lee Bird Field), 25 degrees Fahrenheit temperature, southeast winds at 7 mph, and infrequent light snow flurries throughout the late afternoon. Despite these conditions, lighting was relatively bright and diffuse and did not hinder observation or identification.

Both 7 by 50 mm Bushnell binoculars and a 20 to 45 X Bushnell spotting scope were used to observe the birds. The Swans swam to within 100 yards, but were often 125 to 150 yards distant during our observation. Several different field guides and Nebraska references had been consulted on the day prior to the sighting, while identifying a single Mute Swan at a nearby sandpit lake. Both observers were thus "refreshed" concerning swan identification. Immediately following the sighting we again perused several references to substantiate our field observations.

Greg Hoover, president fo the Tout Bird Club, visited the site later the same day and was able to locate and observe the four immature Tundra Swans, but did not see the adults. Two days later, as Greg and Ron Hoffman attempted to obtain video footage of the four immatures, they took flight and were not seen again.

The Tundra Swan is termed an uncommon or occasional spring migrant, primarily expected in eastern or northeastern Nebraska (Johnsgard, 1986), a casual spring transient in northwestern Nebraska (Rosche 1982), and an uncommon migrant, with two spring sightings listed for Lincoln Co. (Tout Bird Club 1973). Bellrose defines a normal migration corridor that swings east at Devil's Lake, North Dakota, and continues towards Chesapeake Bay. Only rarely do Tundra Swans appear south of this corridor. This Lincoln Co. sighting was thought unusual enough to be sent to the Nebraska Records Committee,

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