

## E & W Wildlife Refuge

HEBER SPRINGS - The trumpeter swans winter at Magness Lake from mid-November thru late February. The swans are visible to birders and other visitors who enjoy seeing the largest of North America's waterfowl.

Why do they come to this one small spot in Arkansas, east of Heber Springs and far from their normal range? The trumpeters are residents of the upper Midwest and aren't found anywhere else in this part of the country, except in isolated incidents. It's a wildlife mystery no one has fully explained. Perry Linder of Heber Springs, who formerly owned the land and lake where the swans live for three or more months each year, said, "When the first three trumpeters showed up speculation was a severe storm had forced the big birds well south of their wintering area."



But they apparently like the Cleburne County countryside and have returned yearly, always to Magness Lake, which is an oxbow off the nearby Little Red River. Magness Lake covers only 30 acres, but the swans like it. They don't hesitate to share the space with Canada geese, a number of mallards and a few assorted other ducks, along with some domestic geese.

The lake and its surrounding area are privately owned, with locked gates. The parking area has been doubled and visitors may view the swans from that area. **Clean shelled corn is the only recommended feed.**

Chances of seeing numbers of the trumpeter swans are best in late afternoons. During the day, they roam around in small groups, feeding in spots sometimes dozens of miles away. But they return to the lake before dark. A few of the swans usually hang around the lake during midday, too. Many of the swans at Heber Springs are white, the sign of adult swans. Some are a dusky gray-brown, sometimes mottled with white; these are the youngsters. They become pure white when they are fully-grown, although the youngsters are nearly as big in body size.

Trumpeters are the largest members of the swan family. They have black bills and noses, with a faint red or salmon-colored line along the edge of their bills. This is sometimes called a grin line. In contrast, the more numerous tundra swans, formally called whistling swans, are smaller and have yellow dots on each side of their bills. Mute swans, not natives of North America but descendants of escapees from zoos and parks, have orange bills with black knobs at the upper base. All of these swans are rare in Arkansas.

Trumpeters normally don't come anywhere near this part of the nation. Sizable numbers of them live in Alaska and smaller numbers in Wyoming, Montana and other western states. Intensive restocking programs, though, are increasing the numbers of trumpeters in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Iowa, and some of these birds occasionally spend winters in northern Missouri.

Trumpeter swans aren't easily confused with snow geese, another waterfowl with predominant white color tipped with some black. A trumpeter swan is huge compared to a snow goose. Trumpeters have wingspans of nearly 8 feet and weigh up to 30 pounds; a snow goose has a 4 1/2-foot wingspan and weighs about six pounds. **Hunting of swans isn't allowed in Arkansas.** Hunters need only to keep the size of the birds in mind. There's no way they can be mistaken for snow geese.

Trumpeter swans were once more common in the central and eastern parts of the nation. But it was over a century ago when they were last recorded in Arkansas before they discovered the Heber Springs site. The trumpeters stay around Magness Lake until late February then they head back north.



**E & W Wildlife Refuge have been very generous in allowing the public the opportunity to view the swans. Please view from designated parking area and help keep the area clean.**

**DIRECTIONS:** To view the swans, drive east on Arkansas Hwy. 110 from its intersection with Arkansas 25 Bypass, just east of Heber Springs. Go 3.9 miles from the intersection to Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, marked with a white sign. Turn left on paved Hays Road; the road sign is very small. Magness Lake is about a half-mile down Hays Road on the right.