

THE NESTING TRUMPETER SWANS OF DAWN, MISSOURI

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My wife Debbie and I live in Dawn, Missouri, south of Chillicothe, along the Livingston - Carroll county line. We have a 1.5 acre pond on our property that is located in the timber. This summer we were extremely blessed to host a breeding pair of Trumpeter Swans. Much of the land near our house is in timber, brush, hay pasture, and row crops. There are 6 square miles south of our house that are wild with no roads running through. There is a Missouri Department of Conservation (DOC) Wildlife Area not too far away where crops such as soybeans, wheat, and corn are planted to provide food for the wildlife. There are no power or telephone lines on our property that would present any obstruction or danger for waterfowl landing in our pond. In fact, there is a 100 - 150 yard-long strip of clear flying towards the pond dam. Behind the dam is a cornfield.

Our swan story started when one of our sons, Scott, was down turkey hunting at our pond earlier this spring and saw what would have been a male Trumpeter Swan. He did not see the female who we now know must have been sitting on a nest. In early June 2005, I was down at our pond catching blue gills for bait for lines for the Grand River and saw the pair of swans with what looked to be two very small babies in between the parents. About a week later, Debbie was with me and we confirmed that there were actually three babies. The babies stayed very close to the parents who were very protective.

Once we realized we had Trumpeter Swans on our property, a couple of friends from Chillicothe who belong to the local Audubon Society brought down a spotting scope and were able to read a red neck band "J94" on one of the birds. I had also e-mailed the National Wildlife Society who then contacted Ron Andrews, a biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). As it turned out, Ron Andrews and his assistant Dave Hoffman were aware that the trumpeter pair had been in our area in 2004. I had seen the swans flying as well, since the pair had been visiting area ponds and lakes within a 5-mile radius from our property. We were told by the Iowa DNR that J94 was a male trumpeter born in northwest Iowa in 2000 and was released in Southeast Iowa in 2001.

The DOC Wildlife Area may be one reason the swans stayed in our area. Last winter, it was mainly open and there was a lot of available planted winter food. Also, the Grand River that is 12 miles north of our farm, just south of Chillicothe, stays open most of the winter. Further, we live about 30 swan-flight miles west of the Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Sumner, Missouri, where the Iowa DNR had reports of these swans being spotted 2 years ago.

We limited our visits to the pond to about once a week so as not to scare the swan family. We bought a new camera to take photos and I also have about 20 minutes of video of the swans. The birds seemed to be getting used to us. I e-mailed The Trumpeter Swan Society who sent me a packet of swan information and also read whatever else I could find out about swans on the Internet. The Iowa DNR folks were quite excited that this was the first documented successful nesting of Trumpeter Swans in Missouri since 1876!

We kept the swans a carefully guarded secret most of the summer since we did not want to scare them off their breeding pond. But, we knew that once the young learned to fly, they would be flying in the area and local people needed to know about them to help keep them safe, especially during goose hunting season. The swans made the front page of *The Kansas City Star* in August 2005 with a large color photo of the two adults and the three large cygnets. There are also plans for the Missouri Department of Conservation to run a story in some of their state wildlife publications.

I believe that there definitely would be more interest from other private landowners in the Mississippi Flyway if the private land owners thought they could develop a nesting lake with the right habitat on a smaller acreage – perhaps between 6-120 acres.

We are glad that God blessed us with the feathered visitors from Iowa and for all the hard work that you and the various conservation personnel in the various states have performed in preserving this magnificent bird.



Figure 1. Scene showing the Neptune's pond habitat in Dawn, Missouri.



Figure 2. Trumpeter pair and three cygnets on the Neptune's pond, Dawn, Missouri.