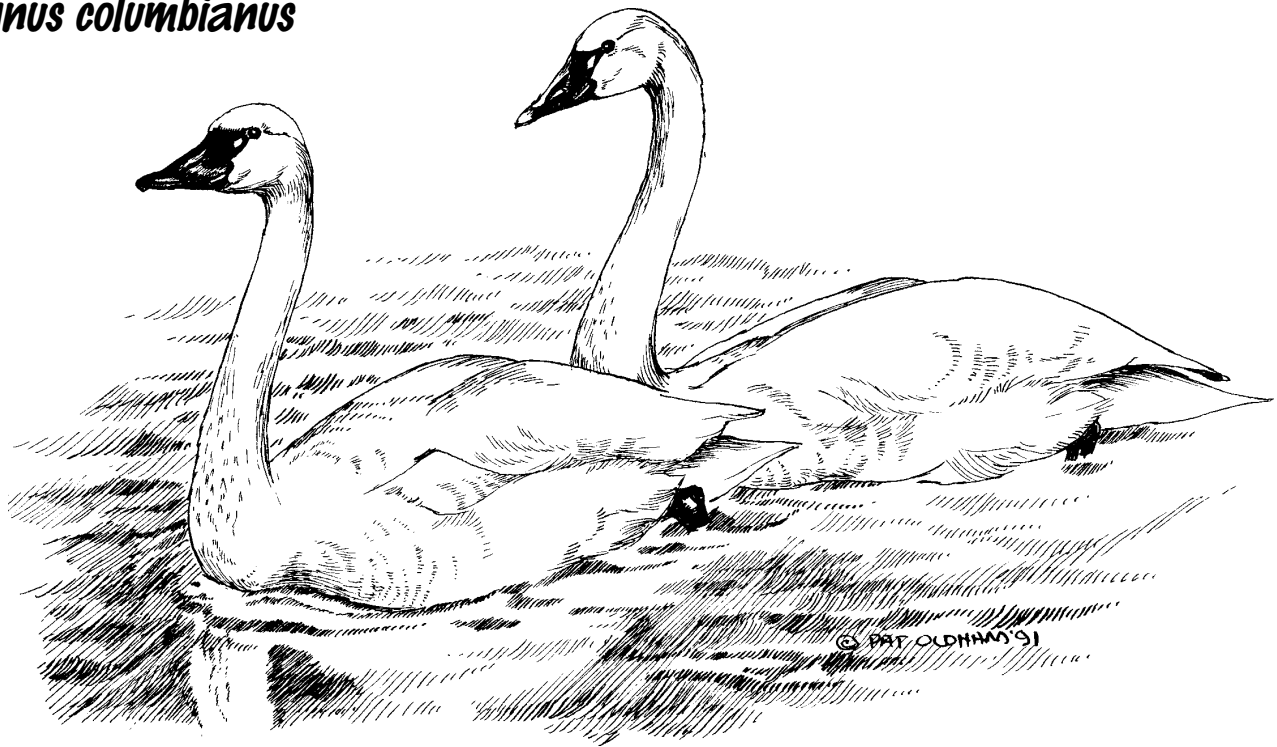




WILDLIFE NOTES

Tundra swan

Cygnus columbianus



An impressive sight in New Mexico is the fall arrival of tundra swans, primarily in the lower Rio Grande and Pecos valleys. Tundra swans may also be seen on other New Mexico waterways. They are smaller than similar-appearing trumpeter swans (*C. buccinator*).

All white, with black bills, tundra swans weigh 12 to 18 pounds and have wingspans of six feet. At close range, you may hear a "hoo" sound from them, preceded by a kind of whistling; they are also called whistling swans.

Tundra swan displays are like small dramas: Adults may land on water, face each other, spread their wings and call loudly. After a brief time, the birds separate and feed

quietly. If they are alarmed, their long necks are stretched up, their bills pointing skyward.

Tundra swans migrate to their northern breeding grounds, from Alaska's Bristol Bay to Baffin Island, with the first spring thaw. They fly in chevrons of 25 to 100 birds. Perhaps 70,000 have wintered in the Chesapeake Bay and San Francisco Bay marshes. Smaller numbers come from other Atlantic Coast estuaries, the Klamath Basin of the northwest, the Carson Sink of Nevada, the Bear River of Utah, the Columbia River of Oregon, and even southern New Mexico. A European subspecies is extremely similar to North American tundra swans, but they do not migrate to this continent.

By mid-May nearly all have arrived in the treeless tundra country of the far north. They are believed to pair for life, and they breed at two to three years. They lay an average of four eggs, which take about 30 days to hatch, in a depression lined with grass, moss, willow and down. Chicks (cygnets) can dive in water at about 10 days of age. They can fly by the age of 10 weeks.

Tundra swans leave the nesting areas in late September, and weather can be a severe factor before and during their migrations. They migrate as family units.

Tundra swans reach their wintering grounds from mid-November into December. Those bound

for the Atlantic Coast make tremendous flights, flying day and night with infrequent stops, at altitudes of 3,000 to 5,000 feet.

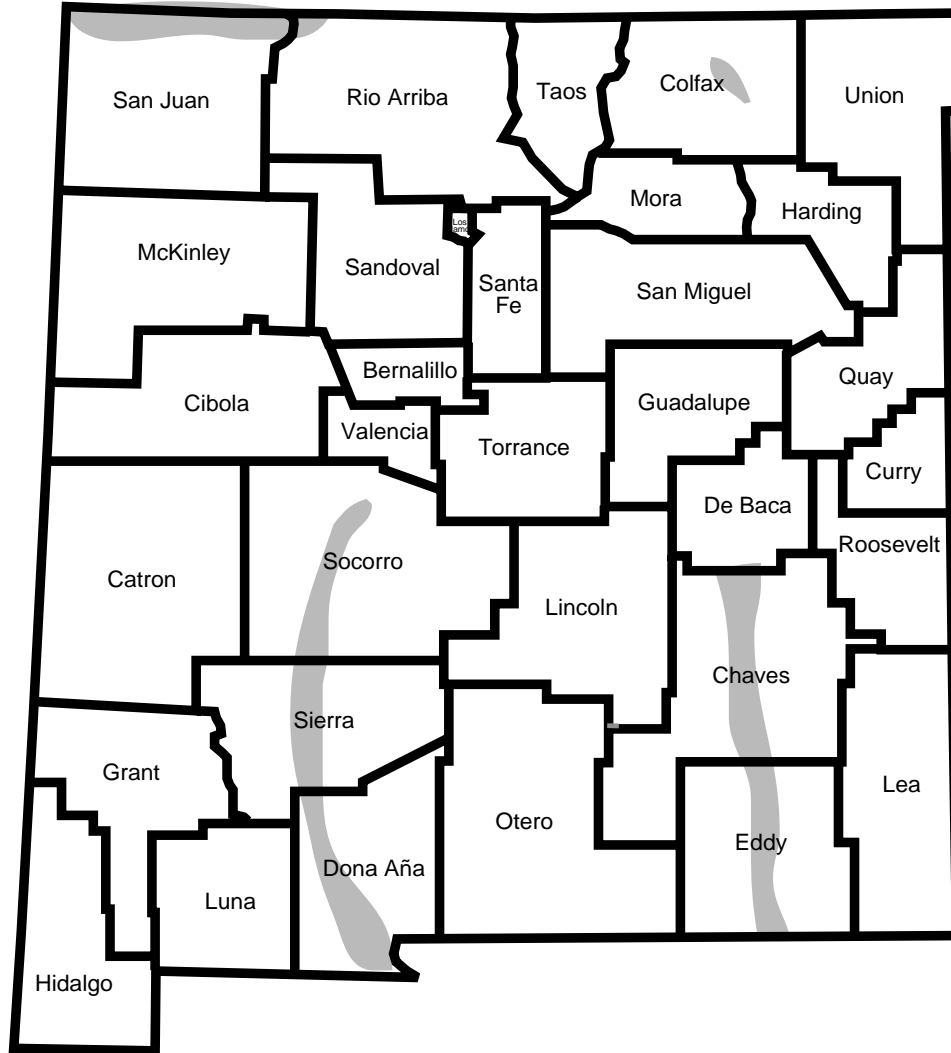
In New Mexico, tundra swans are not numerous, but they are readily seen at the Bosque del Apache and Bitter Lakes National Wildlife Refuges, on the lower Rio Grande and Pecos Rivers and at other locations. They eat many kinds of aquatic plants, grains, some beetles and mollusks.

Hunting for tundra swans is not allowed in New Mexico. There was a great deal of market hunting for

tundra and trumpeter swans in the late 1800s, which reduced the populations and led to legal protection in 1918. Experimental seasons have since been allowed in some states, after a slow recovery. A mature swan will yield a pound of feathers.

A group of swans may sound like a flock of noisy Canada geese, but their calls are more musical than honking. Tundra swans, winter residents from afar, are impressive sights in New Mexico's landscape.

Published 1992



Shaded areas indicated range of tundra swans.

Wildlife Notes is published by the Department of Game and Fish.
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