

Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*



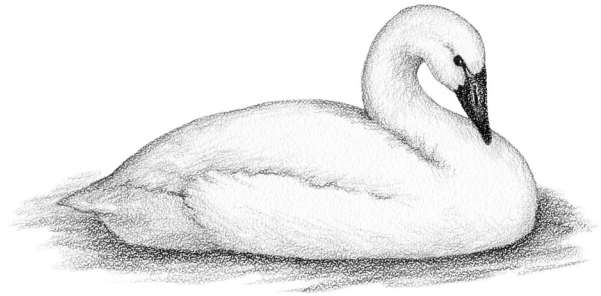
Folk Name: Whistling Swan, Bale of Cotton, Common

American Swan

Status: Migrant

Abundance: Very Rare

Habitat: Lakes



This stunning, huge, white swan is the largest of our waterfowl and the only wild swan found in the Central Carolinas. As its name suggests, it breeds in the Arctic tundra, but up to 80,000 Tundra Swans fly south each year to winter along the coast of northeastern North Carolina. Much smaller numbers winter in South Carolina. North Carolina is one of the few states that allows hunting of Tundra Swan. These hunts are tightly regulated and harvest limits are set annually. According to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, permits might be issued for up to 6,000 birds, but the harvest usually averages about 2,500 swans.

W.L. McAtee provided this adaptation of English explorer John Lawson's early account of Tundra Swans at Sapona, an American Indian village near Salisbury, around 1701: "It is beautiful by a numerous Train of Swans, and other sorts of Water-Fowl, not common, though extraordinary pleasing to the eye...the Indians brought in some Swans and Geese, which we had our share of." Leverett Loomis designated the Tundra Swan as an uncommon winter visitor in Chester County in the 1880s. In 1945, Jim Layton and Binford Moon found four "Whistling Swans" in the Town of Pineville in Mecklenburg County during the Christmas holidays, just after the end of World War II.

Doug Pratt and Mark Simpson found a Tundra Swan at Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge on February 10, 1967, and H. Lee Jones found one, possibly the same bird, nearby at Gaddy's Pond the following week. One was reported on the Chester County Christmas Bird Count on December 29, 1977. Three days later, Flo Cobey found three adult Tundra Swans about 20 miles from there, at Creech's Pond in York County. Ms. Cobey later noted she believed these birds could be counted in Mecklenburg

County as well.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, inland reports of this species began to increase as the number of wintering swans increased in the eastern part of the state. Charlie Wooten found one near the Town of Elgin in Kershaw County on December 24, 1983. Fred Hill reported one in northern Mecklenburg County on February 1, 1990. Three were counted on the Christmas Bird Count at Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge on January 4, 1998, and four were tallied on the count the following year on January 3, 1999. A pair was observed in Duck Cove at Cowan's Ford Wildlife Refuge on March 17, 1999, and again on 2 May.

Sightings of Tundra Swan in the Central Carolinas have increased since the turn of the twenty-first century. Dwayne Martin found one on Lake Hickory in Alexander County on January 12–22, 2001. Steve Tracy had a pair land on Robinwood Lake in Gastonia on February 17, 2001. He was able to carefully view them and noted both their black bills and small yellow lores. Alan Kneidel had a pair at Lake Don T. Howell in Cabarrus County on March 12, 2007. Dwayne Martin photographed five on Lake Hickory on February 29, 2016, providing the first Catawba County record and tying the record for the largest single flock found in this region. In addition to these reports, Tundra Swan have been found 9 out the last 10 years at Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge, with a high count of five in 2008 and one arriving early on 20 November in 2017.