

The Occurrence of the Whistling Swan (*Cygnus Columbianus L.*)
in Delaware County, Indiana

ROBERT H. COOPER, Ball State Teachers College

It seemed advisable to report the following information as a matter of record for the printed materials of the Academy since it is thought that the information might be of value to scientists doing research in the state of Indiana in the field of zoology, and especially in the field of ornithology.

On March 11, 1962, Mrs. Margaret Studebaker and Mrs. Arlene Carter of the Ball State Teachers College staff sighted thirteen whistling swans on the ice of the Prairie Creek Reservoir in Perry Township of Delaware County about six miles southeast of Muncie. This body of water was recently impounded by the Muncie Water Works by the building of a dam across the Prairie Creek Valley. It is approximately three and one-half miles long and one-half mile wide. It has one large arm of water extending east from the north end of the east side of the main reservoir. A concrete bridge crosses this arm near the main body of the reservoir so that persons driving along the east side of the reservoir have a fine observation point. This area is a rather protected and secluded area for water birds. On this day the swans were on ice on the west side of the reservoir. Mrs. Studebaker and Mrs. Carter contacted Dr. Robert Cooper, head of the Science Department of Ball State Teachers College, and Mr. Harold Zimmerman, Certified Public Accountant, Muncie, Indiana, who has long been a skilled observer in the field of ornithology.

On March 17th thirteen swans were still present on the reservoir as seen again by Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Studebaker.

On March 18th Mr. Zimmerman and Dr. Cooper made a special observation with field glasses and with Bausch and Lomb spotting scope to make more certain of the identity. At this time there were sixteen whistling swans. Some of them showed the gray marking of the young swan.

On March 22nd Mr. and Mrs. Pete Phillips of the Ball State Teachers College staff and Mrs. Studebaker again observed the swans and confirmed the observation of sixteen.

Again on March 24th Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Studebaker drove to the Prairie Creek Reservoir to make further observation and verified that there were still sixteen whistling swans on the water occupying the far eastern projection. Many ducks were present at this time including the redhead, canvas-back, ring-necked, lesser scaup, and shoveller.

On March 27th Dr. Cooper took an ornithology class of seventeen students to the area at 6 a.m. and saw twenty whistling swans circling over the body of water and then coming in for a landing on the water east of the bridge. At that time the ducks mentioned previously were present as well as buffle-heads, ruddy ducks, pintails, blue-winged teals,

gadwalls, hooded mergansers, great blue herons, horned grebes, coots, pied-billed grebes, green-winged teal, and black ducks.

Early in the day on March 21st Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Studebaker made observations and counted twenty swans at that time.

On March 31st Dr. Cooper, along with others, was at the bridge observing the twenty whistling swans. Shortly after 5:30 p.m. all of the swans except two began to swim west toward the bridge. They came close enough that the yellow basal spot on the beak in front of the eye could be seen very readily, and the dull pinkish-black of the beak of the young could be seen as well as the gray on the necks. A lady in a car with an Ohio license stepped out and with her little camera and flash attachment took a picture. The observer does not know whether the flash caused the flock to take off at that time, but the birds did take off immediately to the east without two which were over on the margin of the lake. The flock circled two times over the area without being in formation. While doing that they picked up the two that were still on the water and immediately all of them started flying west to the bridge and were in perfect formation when crossing over the highway, with eight birds lined up on the left-hand side of the V as they angled northwest and twelve on the right-hand side. This was at 6:15 p.m., and it was getting dusk. The birds were not seen on the water after that. Presumably they were starting out on a night flight.

Those of us living in the Muncie area shall watch closely this autumn to see whether or not the whistling swans might stop on their southward journey.

Dr. Cooper and the students in the ornithology class wrote a letter to the mayor of Muncie urging him to try to shut off the neck of water where there were so many water birds in order to keep the sailboats and motorboats out of the area. No attention was paid to the letter so far as the authors of the letter knew. No reply was given. Those interested in ornithology will not only be watching this autumn for the return of water fowl, but also will be watching carefully the spring of 1963 to see whether or not the whistling swans return. The birds were present for at least twenty-one days on the Prairie Creek Reservoir.