

# Observers Sought in Whistling Swan Study

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is asking for public assistance in reporting marked or colored swans sighted in Alaska, particularly along the Arctic and Bering Sea coastal area and across the North Slope.

This is part of a continent-wide study of the life history and migratory patterns of whistling swans.

The whistling swan has one of the most extensive migrations of all North American waterfowl.

It breeds on the coastal tundra of Alaska from Bristol Bay, north and on across Arctic Canada as far as Southampton Island.

These swans winter along the Atlantic Coast from Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, south to Albemarle Sound, North Carolina. In the west they winter primarily in California.

Over half the North American population, estimated at approximately 100,000 swans, winter

in the east.

On the other hand, 60 per cent or more of them breed in Alaska.

Cooperators from all parts of the North American continent are helping to map their migratory movements. A sample of the population has been marked with large, numbered plastic neck collars.

This is a similar procedure used by Dr. William Sladen of Johns Hopkins University on Antarctic penguins, making recapture or shooting unnecessary.

Without disturbing the bird, identification numbers can be read from a distance; thus many resightings are made during the bird's lifetime of 15 or more years.

Different colors are used to identify the area where the birds are banded, such as blue for Alaska, red for Arctic Canada, black for Maryland, green for California, and yellow for the Great Lakes area.

There is a good reason for using the whistling swan in this study. Any large bird with extensive migrations must have adequate resting and feeding places enroute.

These can be adversely affected in a short time by pollution. The swan appears to be less adaptable to such change than the Canada goose and other waterfowl; and thus it could prove a good indicator of environmental degradation.

In addition these conspicuous and graceful birds enhance our appreciation of wildlife in general.

The most famous mated pair in this project carry black collar CO28 (banded in Maryland) and blue collar A301 (banded in Alaska).

They have been sighted for several summers on the North Slope near Prudhoe Bay and reappear at Ruthsburg, Maryland, where they spend the winter.

Observers should write down

the date and time of observation, where the bird was sighted, color of its neck collar, if possible, the number, the number of other swans in the vicinity, and whether the swan was observed from the air or ground.

Other information such as weather conditions and any unusual circumstances would be useful.

With everyone's help in protecting these magnificent birds and reporting the sighting of marked individuals, a great deal of important information will be accumulated.

Many people are watching with interest along their migration route, both north in the spring and south in the fall.

These swans are fully protected in Alaska and concerned citizens should immediately report any hunting of them to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.