

Swans return home

Sad stories don't always have a sad ending.

The last two winters have been brutal to our wildlife and without the wildlife rehabilitation refuges far and few between. We would have lost a lot of lives, and they would not have died quickly, but suffered long drawn out deaths of starvation, stuck in ice.

I want to tell you about one happy story from the New Tecumseth area ? one of which I was able to be a part of.

His name is Dean, his number is M45. He is a trumpeter swan. Dean #M45 is part of the trumpeter swan restoration program in Ontario, a not for profit organization run by volunteers. In 1982 this program was founded by retired MNR biologist Harry Lumsden. Trumpeter swans are native to North America and they are the largest of all swans.

Females are called a ?pen? weighing in around 20-25 lbs (9-11.3 kg). Male is called a ?cob? and weighs in around 20-30 lbs or (9-13.6 kg). Wingspans are massive at 8 ft or (2.5 meters). One may say they sound rather like a bugle when they call, and can be quite vocal.

In average in the wild their life span can be about 12 years old although they have gone upwards to the late teens and early 20's on occasion.

In captivity of course with little or no threats they can easily reach 30 years old.

Swans are one of the most beautiful birds to watch, especially during the spring when mating season is upon us. They are magnificent. Dancing, chasing, and vocalizing. Nesting in wetlands with a nest of about 6 ft or (1.8 meters), laying 3 to 8 eggs in late May and incubating those eggs for 33 days. When born the young are called cygnets and are fully fledged in about 18 days.

The little balls of fluff are adorable and the parents are very protective. You do not want to mess with a swan. A swan's wing can break a human leg. They are very strong. Give them space and respect them. Teach children to watch from a distance and keep your dogs on a leash by your side at all times.

A swan is a protected species under the migratory bird act. If you see someone harming a swan, letting dogs chase them, shooting at them, etc. call the MNR tip line ASAP at 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667). These actions are illegal.

Just because a swan is such a big bird does not mean it cannot get into trouble. Quite the opposite is true. Hydro lines, lead fishing sinkers and lead shot, fishing hooks, soft drink cans, fishing line, oil spills, harassment by boaters, personal watercrafts, and of course predators in the wild and sickness. But a big one is lead. Lead poisoning is slow and painful and avoidable. Use lead free fishing tackle and never leave any discarded fishing line around. Swans and many other waterfowl tip and eat from the bottom. Ingesting lead pellets and sinkers left behind. Many swans are euthanized every year because of lead poisoning. Many others die. It's a horrible slow death.

Then there are the last couple winters that were very hard on all wildlife species. Starvation, freezing into the ice. This is what happened to Dean. He was starving on the ice in Whitby. Because people watch the swans very closely in wintertime, a kind person found him and reported him and he was rescued.

Again your safety is first. Never go out on unsafe ice to rescue a swan or anything else.

M45 was taken to Wild Earth Refuge in Oshawa. Kelli Polsinelli took Dean in at only 14lbs.he couldn't even hold his head up he was so weak. He had a touch of pneumonia as well. Kelli decided that M45, who should have weighed 30 lbs as an adult swan, was in need of more than she could give him, Kelli wrapped him up and sent him off to Sandy Pines Wildlife Center in Nappanee, were Sue Meech was able to care for him until he was ready for release.

M45 has a mate named Lisa. They had cygnets together and a happy life. When M45 got sick, he flew away to Whitby were he continued to go downhill until somebody spotted him starving to death. He and Lisa were separated.

Three or four weeks into rehab M45 was ready to come home. Gary Lane, a volunteer who transports wildlife to and from wildlife rehab centers took the long trek to Nappanee, and brought Dean home. He was released in the area he and Lisa call home and raised their young. The release went well. Dean is very healthy and strong, but still no Lisa. We are hopeful that she will return and they will find each other again. If you see M45 you can report him to: trumpeterswan@live.com so that they know where he is and how he is doing.

If you feed waterfowl, never feed moldy bread as this can ?harm? them. Only clean ?untreated? corn.

If you see a swan, get its location, tag and or band number and date seen. GPS if possible.And remember, lead kills! Buy lead free. As for Dean, hopefully Lisa and he will get back together again. Swans mate for life!

