



For more information, contact:

Al Setka
Director of Communications
Great Ape Trust of Iowa
515.243.3580
515.720.7430 (mobile)
asetka@greatapetrust.org

With open water on Great Ape Trust's lake, trumpeter swans Morgan and Olivia thrive

Des Moines, Iowa – December 19, 2007 – Morgan and Olivia, the breeding pair of trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) [released](#) last spring on Great Ape Trust of Iowa's 30-acre lake, are thriving as snow and ice blanket the Midwest. With a dense layer of down that makes them almost impervious to the cold, trumpeter swans have evolved to tolerate such conditions. In fact, it is not unheard of for trumpeters to withstand extended periods of temperatures as low as -22 degrees Fahrenheit.

Great Ape Trust's agreement to accept the birds as part of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Trumpeter Swan Restoration Project came with a pledge to care for them through the winter.

"Because Olivia and Morgan are flightless, they cannot fly to open, ice-free water, which they need for feeding and to keep their feathers waterproof and warm," said [Dr. Benjamin Beck](#), director of conservation at Great Ape Trust. "Thus, The Trust not only provides winter food, but we have also installed an aerator to keep about an acre of the pond free of ice."

Trumpeter swans were on the brink of extinction in North America a half-century ago. In 1933, only 69 of the majestic birds remained in the continental United States. They had been prevalent in the 1800s, but as settlers moved in, they began hunting

NEWS RELEASE

them as a game, taking their eggs for human consumption, and using their feathers for powder puffs and their quills for ink pens and hat trimmings. Wetlands were also disappearing, and the swan population declined rapidly.

Now, thanks to the Iowa DNR and its sister agencies in other Midwest states, trumpeter swans are coming back in significant numbers. The Iowa DNR alone has released 750 swans since 1995. Today, there are about 16,000 trumpeter swans in North America and the species is no longer considered in danger of becoming extinct.

“It’s a tremendous comeback,” said Ron Andrews, coordinator of the DNR’s Swan Restoration Project, “much better than we expected.”

Morgan and Olivia were joined briefly by four other trumpeters that have since been seen at nearby Easter Lake. Andrews said more visitors may appear before winter is over. “A bubbler system that maintains adequate water for several swans, feed and the presence of other swans is critical,” he said. “They capitalize on the feed and water, and you could end up with six, eight, 10 extra swans.”

Large wintering populations of swans have been reported in recent years near Atlantic, Mason City and Clinton, Iowa. Near the Twin Cities, as many as 1,500 of the elegant white birds have congregated for the winter.

Andrews said there’s some evidence that trumpeter swans are establishing new migratory patterns, though he has learned to “expect the unexpected when it comes to trumpeter swans.”

“We expected them to show patterns similar to geese, but they have their own protocol, and there are differences from swan to swan, swan family to swan family, and from year to year,” he said. “They’re developing new migratory traditions, and a lot of them aren’t migrating to begin with.”

GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape –

NEWS RELEASE

bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to www.GreatApeTrust.org.

####

Insights Through Collaborations with Apes