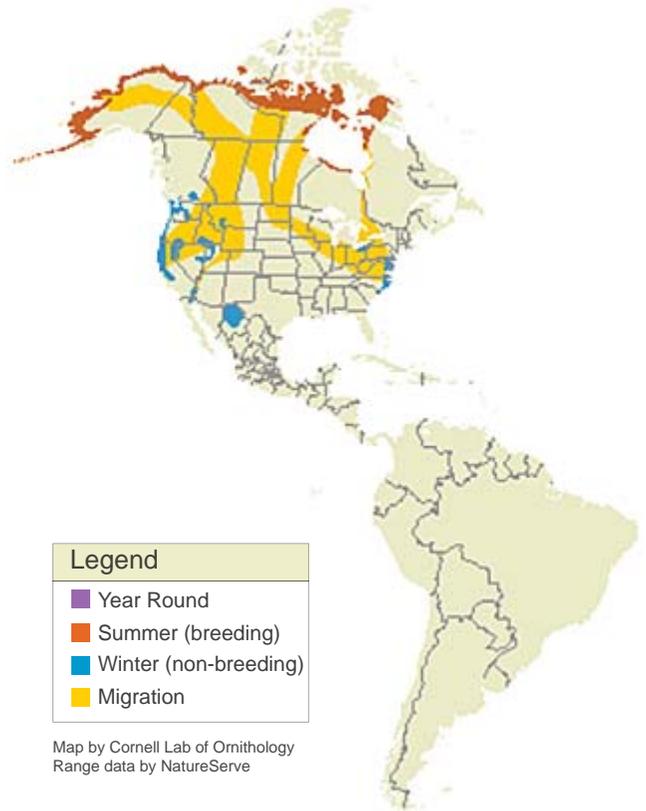


Tundra Swan

Cygnus columbianus

On wintry days, flocks of North America's most numerous swans gather on lakes and estuaries or descend out of gray skies. A characteristic whistling in their wings led Meriwether Lewis to call them "whistling swans," a name still in use. These elegant creatures—slightly smaller than our other native species, the Trumpeter Swan—nest on arctic tundra and visit the U.S. only on migration and in winter. Most have a smudge of yellow at the base of their black bill, but otherwise are pure white.



Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Tundra Swans are very large waterfowl with heavy bodies and long necks. The bill slopes gently away from the head.

Color Pattern

Tundra Swans have entirely white plumage. The bill is mostly black and usually has a yellow spot at the base. The legs and feet are black. Immature birds are gray-tinted on the wings, head, and neck.

Behavior

On the water, Tundra Swans keep their necks straight, and in the air they fly with their necks outstretched. On the water, they often tip up to forage in the manner of dabbling ducks. They form large flocks.

Habitat

Tundra Swans nest on arctic tundra. Look for Tundra Swans during winter on estuaries and coastal waters, and some inland lakes. On migration and in winter, they may leave the water to feed in agricultural fields.

Cool Facts

- The whistling swan, the American race of the Tundra Swan, currently is considered the same species as the Eurasian race, the Bewick's swan. They were considered separate species in the past, distinguished by the large yellow patches on the face of the Bewick's swan.
- During the breeding season the Tundra Swan sleeps almost entirely on land, but in the winter it sleeps more often on water.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 47.2 - 57.9 inches
- Wingspan - 66.1 inches
- Weight - 134.0 - 370.4 ounces