

CONSERVATION *Showcase*



Swans Nest in Restored Appanoose Co. Wetlands

For the first time in more than a century trumpeter swans nested in Appanoose County, thanks in part to restored and enhanced wetlands and other habitat implemented by outdoor enthusiasts Steve Archer and Richard Doll of rural Moulton.

The swans were released on Archer's property three years ago by Wildlife Biologist Dave Hoffman of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, who coordinates the DNR's swan restoration program. In early May 2009 Archer began to see the swans become territorial in one of his restored wetlands. He saw the male swan chase off Canadian geese – a sign they may be getting ready to nest. “(The swans) kept everything else off the wetland,” said Archer. “During nesting the male wouldn't let anything near that female.”

Archer said the cygnets hatched on June 12. “It took about two days for them to hatch completely,” he said.

Trumpeter swans are the world's largest waterfowl, weighing from 25-35 pounds when fully grown. They nested throughout Iowa prior to settlement, but wetland draining and unregulated hunting brought their demise in the early 1880s. In 1993 the DNR developed



Relatives Richard Doll (left) and Steve Archer (right) have a passion for the outdoors and wildlife. Almost half of their combined 1,000 acres in Appanoose County are wetlands.

a plan to restore trumpeter swans in Iowa. And in 1998 three cygnets hatched from a wild nesting trumpeter pair in Dubuque County.

Trumpeter swans form strong pair bonds that can last for years. They build their nests five feet across, which are usually among aquatic plants. They will often use the tops of muskrat houses for a nest base.

Nearly 1,000 trumpeter swans have been released in Iowa since 1993. And from 1998 to 2008, about 500 cygnets were reported hatched in Iowa, according to Hoffman.

Together, Archer and Doll own about 1,000 acres of wildlife habitat, including timber, wetlands, prairie and pasture in southeast

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Appanoose County – excellent habitat for trumpeter swans, which gravitate to riverine wetlands, lakes, ponds, and marshes; open wooded regions; and prairies.

The Archer/Doll land sits adjacent to two publicly owned and managed recreation areas – the Sedan Bottoms Wildlife Management Area, 4,400 acres of wetlands long the Chariton River Bottoms; and Rebel’s Cove Conservation Area, 4,225 acres of forestland, cropland, grassland, wetlands and ponds in Missouri. “This is a block of area where everything is being managed the same way,” said Archer. “We help each other and get things from each other.”

More than 350 acres of the Archer/Doll land is enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. All but 55 acres of the adjacent Sedan Bottoms area is also enrolled in WRP.

Swans nested on this wetland in June near Steve Archer’s log cabin-style home in southern Appanoose County.



Cygnets hatched June 12 on one of Steve Archer’s wetlands in Appanoose County – the first time in more than a century.

Hoffman says the swan restoration program helps promote the water quality and flood control benefits that wetlands provide. “You see what landowners can do when they get involved with government programs, such as WRP and CRP,” he said. “If you build it, they will come’ certainly rings true with wetlands and wildlife.”

Archer says WRP has financially enabled him to restore his land. He says many people take and never give back, but he is focused on giving back. “Dick and I get use out of our land, but we also spend a lot of our own time and money to further enhance it,” he said.

Doll said he tries to find funding for projects he wants, but spends his own money if he can’t find funding. “I love what I do and see out here,” he said. “I haven’t talked to anyone who’s been out here who wasn’t totally impressed with what Steve and I are doing.”

Archer is the one who can take land and see the restoration potential in his head, Doll admits. “Steve is really creative in the types of trees that work best,” said Doll. “I’ve followed what he’s done. He has a knack for seeing how things will work out.”

Archer has experimented with trees that thrive in wet areas, adjacent to the easement areas. For example, he planted bald cypress,

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which is often associated with the Louisiana bayous. He also planted tamarack trees and black spruce, which grow readily in the Wisconsin bogs. “I like something different – something nobody else is growing,” he said. “We’ve also planted a lot of swamp white oak that like wet areas, with a good acorn crop.”

They are proud of the habitat diversity they’ve created. “We have noticed an increase in deer, and the quality of our deer,” said Archer. “We are also home to pelicans, gray herons, pileated woodpeckers, otters, and eagles that nest every spring.”

They have even attracted bird watching clubs, forestry experts, and nationally-known sportsmen to see and experience their unique lands for themselves.

Appanoose County District Conservationist Margaret Cope with NRCS says much of the land Archer and Doll manage was farmed

at one time. In the Chariton River Bottoms, Cope said their restoration efforts benefit the area’s natural resources. “When it floods now, you see the water quality benefits,” she said, “and the wildlife benefits have been tremendous.”

Archer and Doll share a common passion for wildlife and the outdoors, but they are also related by marriage – Archer is married to Doll’s cousin. Both recently built log cabin-style homes on their rural properties, and plan to spend the rest of their lives enjoying their wildlife haven. They plan to keep restoring and enhancing their land. “There’s always something you can do,” said Archer. “I’m the kind of person who always needs a project – something to look forward to.”

As for the swans, Archer says, “Now that they’ve nested here, I hope they make this their permanent home.”

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This wetland on Steve Archer’s land is enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Wetlands filter pollutants from upland runoff, help control flooding, and maintain wildlife populations, housing the majority of Iowa’s endangered species.

