

Invasive Species Management: Mute Swans



Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) are large European birds that were first introduced into Michigan in 1919 for ornamental purposes on private ponds. Their offspring soon escaped to the wild, and surveys conducted 2000-2010 showed the Mute Swan population in Michigan was growing extraordinarily fast, increasing by about 10% a year and showing no sign of slowing down.

Mute Swans are known to:

- Eat eight pounds of aquatic vegetation a day, and uproot an additional 20+ pounds while feeding
- Be extremely territorial, preventing native waterfowl (including state-threatened Trumpeter Swans and Common Loons) from nesting on the same lakes
- Sometimes kill native waterfowl
- Frequently attack people who venture too close to their young, including kayakers and boaters

Concerned with the rapidly increasing population and its impacts on native habitats, wildlife and human safety, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) adopted a plan in 2010 to reduce the population of Mute Swans to no more than 2,000 by 2030. Funding for the management program is provided through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), and removal is conducted primarily by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) at no cost to participating landowners.

- Mute Swan adults have an orange bill with a black tip and a full black knob at the base
- Native Trumpeter and Tundra Swan adults have an entirely black bill with no knob

Two basic methods of control are used, and permits from MDNR are required for both. Mute Swan eggs are coated in oil to prevent them from developing, preventing the population from increasing and also discouraging aggressive behavior from adult swans protecting cygnets. This method alone is not sufficient because Mute Swans can live 10-20 years. Lethal control of adult swans is widely considered by wildlife management authorities to be the most humane and efficient method to control mute swan populations. The program has been quite successful in Michigan, and surveys have seen a population reduction from a high of 17,520 in 2013 to 8,133 in 2017.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation (OCPR) includes Mute Swan control as part of a suite of invasive species management and nuisance animal programs to protect natural areas and safety of park patrons. Since 2015, parks staff have controlled Mute Swan eggs at known nesting locations on park lands.

Beginning in 2019, OCPR will partner with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services to strategically implement humane removal of adult swans within parks. Control efforts will be performed by highly-skilled USDA staff in close coordination with park operations to ensure the highest safety standards are met for park patrons, staff and wildlife.

For more information on OCPR, MDNR and USDA APHIS Mute Swan Management please visit: [Oakgov.com/parks/getinvolved/Pages/Natural-Resource-Management.aspx](https://oakgov.com/parks/getinvolved/Pages/Natural-Resource-Management.aspx)

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