



OREGON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

LOVE IS IN THE AIR? NOT WHEN IT COMES TO MUTE SWANS

SALEM, Oregon—Elegant, beautiful, romantic, and majestic. These are just a few names that people use to describe swans of any kind, including the non-native Mute Swan. But chances are that you won't catch an Oregon biologist referring to the Mute Swan using any of these adjectives.

Mute Swans were introduced to the United States in the mid-1800s by well-intentioned citizens that wanted the large white birds to grace their city parks and estates. But like most invasive species, Mute Swan populations expanded, creating serious problems for some native wildlife species.

The problems Mute Swans cause are a result of their size, aggressiveness, and voracious appetite for aquatic vegetation. These 40-plus pound birds aggressively defend their territories, and have been known to attack and displace just about any size, age, and species of native waterfowl. In Maryland, a population of 4,000 Mute Swans now exists in and around Chesapeake Bay—from five captive Mute Swans that escaped in 1962. This large population of feral non-native birds is causing a decline in native Tundra Swans, affecting crabbing and fishing because of the estimated 9 million pounds of submerged aquatic vegetation the swans eat annually, and displacing state-threatened bird species, such as black skimmers.

“The Mute Swan is the only bird on Oregon’s 100 Worst List because of what we know about this species as its population has expanded in other states,” said Oregon Wildlife Integrity Coordinator Rick Boatner. “Well-intentioned people value the beauty of this bird, but it is important we understand what can happen to Oregon native fish and wildlife when non-native species like Mute Swans are introduced.”

Oregon is one of two states that makes it illegal to import, possess, or sell Mute Swans—Washington is the other. Despite these laws, Mute Swans are found on a few scattered lakes in the state.

How did Mute Swans arrive on Oregon’s landscape? It is thought that the first introductions may have occurred in 1921 in Ashland, followed by introductions in the 1940s along the Deschutes River in Bend. From 1985 to 1995, the breeding population in central Oregon increased from four to 56 birds. Seeing another Chesapeake Bay in the making, the state swiftly took action and

implemented population controls. The result is a handful of infertile birds in the downtown Bend area. A few known pairs occur in Salem and the Portland metropolitan area.

“It can be very difficult for the public to understand the need to reduce or eliminate a species they have grown to enjoy,” said Oregon Invasive Species Council Chair Sam Chan. “But we must remain vigilant in our efforts to protect Oregon landscapes and the native fish and wildlife that call this place home. If we don’t, we stand to lose far more than we could possibly ever gain by the introduction of a non-native invasive species.”

February is known as the month of love and romance. It is okay if a pair of swans symbolizes this for you—just make your vision includes a swan without an orange bill. Our native Tundra Swan and Trumpeter Swan need our help to maintain their place in Oregon.

The mission of the Oregon Invasive Species Council is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon.

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