



NEW YORK STATE ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

for the birds and birders of New York State since 1948

NYSDEC Bureau of Wildlife
Swan Management Plan
625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4754

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We are writing in support of the pending Draft Management Plan For Mute Swans in New York State. This plan addresses a difficult but important issue regarding an introduced, invasive species that has significant negative effects on the ecology of the state and its native wildlife.

The growing and expanding population of Mute Swans in NY State and beyond has affected native waterfowl through competition for food and nesting habitat, as well as the swans' aggressive nature toward waterfowl, including nesting birds. Other concerns include water contamination and public safety.

As the plan notes, the now established and increasing Mute Swan population in the Lake Ontario region is a particular threat. This area contains much habitat that is suitable for swans, but is also very important for native waterfowl and marsh birds. If swans persist and expand in this region, there will certainly be negative impacts for other species, a number of which are already at risk.

In addition, sensitive resources that are particularly affected by Mute Swans should be a priority for management action. These include areas such as the Peconic Estuary on Long Island, where swans are a factor contributing to the decline of eelgrass beds, a critical habitat for fish and shellfish spawning.

The plan documents the growth and spread of Mute Swan populations in New York since their introduction nearly 100 years ago. The results of the NY State Breeding Bird Atlases of 1980-85 and 200-2005, in which our organization had a major role, show the spread of breeding Mute Swans up the Hudson Valley and westward to Lake Ontario. It is clear that this expansion and the resulting impacts will continue, and likely will be exacerbated by coming climate changes.

We strongly support the plan's focus on public education regarding the effects of Mute Swans as an invasive species. This effort will reduce the likelihood of swans being introduced into new locations, and can lessen public resistance to population control efforts. Likewise, we support the plan's calls for stronger and clearer regulations on possessing, transporting, propagating, feeding, and release of Mute Swans. These controls are overdue and will serve to largely halt the increase and spread of swans through human activities.

It should be noted that at least in the Rochester area, the presence of Mute Swans can be traced to escapes from local exotic bird holders, rather than range expansion. This points up the need for effective controls on captive birds, to avoid such new populations.

The proposals to control and reduce Mute Swan populations through nest and egg destruction, capture, euthanizing, and hunting are more controversial, but should be utilized as necessary to remove swans, particularly in areas where they are documented as posing a specific threat to native wildlife, and/or establishing new populations. These control efforts should be targeted to the different regions of the state, in recognition of the length of time the birds have been a presence, in public attitudes, and the degree of intrusion in carrying out control activities.

We would caution against allowing non-DEC or non-related agency personnel to carry out these control activities. It is important that such actions be carried out professionally and carefully to avoid errors that could result in public backlash.

We support the plan's intent to evaluate the success of Mute Swan management efforts periodically. There may well be the need to adjust strategies and actions based on effectiveness, population changes, and public response.

Finally, we urge the department to give consideration to the potential effects of the presence and spread of Trumpeter Swans in NY State. The status of this species as a "native" species is unclear, as are the ramifications of efforts to establish populations in neighboring Ontario. It would be unfortunate to allow an additional possibly harmful species to replace one removed at significant expense and controversy.

Board of Directors
New York State Ornithological Assoc., Inc.