

# MUTE SWAN

*Cygnus olor*

**Status:** Not endangered

**Habitat:** wetlands

**Range:** The mute swan is originally an Old World species and was introduced to the United States. Wild, self-sustaining populations are found on the East Coast.

**Diet in the wild:** grasses, leaves, aquatic plants

**Other facts:**

- Mute swans are beautiful birds often seen gliding across ponds and lakes with their necks held in an S-curve and their wings arched over their backs. Their long necks allow them to feed on plants under water without having to dive for them. Male and female mute swans are identical in appearance.
- Mute swans are just one of over 140 different species of waterfowl (ducks, geese, swans) found throughout the world.
- Waterfowl such as swans spend a great deal of time preening. As they preen they coat their feathers with oil for waterproofing that comes from a special oil gland near their tail feathers.
- Each fall, 100 million waterfowl migrate from Canada to the southern U.S., Central America, and South America. There are four major “flyways” in the US. These are common routes traveled by different types of waterfowl. Some flyways may have been used by waterfowl for more than a million years.
- Scientists are still trying to discover how migrating birds navigate. Several theories exist, including the hypothesis that they use the earth’s magnetic field, much in the same way that humans use compasses to guide them. It is also believed that they use the sun and stars to help them find their way.
- Young waterfowl hatch with their eyes open and with a covering of downy feathers. Young swans, called cygnets, are able to swim, dive, and find their own food within hours after they hatch.
- Many waterfowl populations are declining due to habitat loss. Each year 300,000 acres of wetlands are destroyed. More than half of the United State’s wetlands have been lost.
- The “Prairie Pothole” area in the central U.S. provides critical habitat for millions of waterfowl. More than half of all ducks hatched in North America each year come from the Prairie Pothole area. What humans may label as land that is “no good” unless it is drained and developed is actually vitally important for these magnificent birds.
- The northern habitats of many types of waterfowl are also threatened by oil and mineral mining. Oil spills also continue to be a threat to all types of aquatic life.

