



# MUTE SWAN

The Mute swan, *Cygnus olor*, is a large, non-native, non-migratory species of waterfowl that is native to much of Eurasia. It was introduced to the US in the late-1800s for ornamental purposes, and was first reported in Delaware in the 1950s in Rehoboth Beach. It was protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, until 2005, when the US Department of the Interior declared the Mute swan a non-native, unprotected species. It also holds an exotic, invasive status in DE, and it is unlawful to buy, sell, trade, or possess Mute swans or their eggs, or to release them into the wild.

Mute swans are one of the heaviest flying birds, ranging in weight from 18-32lbs. Juveniles, called cygnets, are gray, buff, or even white, with grayish black bills, until approximately one year of age. Mature birds are pure white, with bright orange bills, black skin around the eyes, and black legs. Mute swans are very territorial and will aggressively defend their nests, mates, and cygnets. They may attack using bony spurs in their wings and/or bite with their bills, and have the potential to injure or kill native water birds that venture too close to a nest.

Each day, mute swans can consume up to 8lbs. of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), removing it faster than the plants can recover. SAV provides valuable habitat for aquatic fauna and is an important food source for native water birds. Their aggressive behavior can also deter native water birds, such as ducks, from using water bodies for nesting. In addition to affecting native flora and fauna, Mute swans may disrupt recreational activities, such as canoeing and kayaking, and cause property damage. There have also been reported cases of Mute swan injuries to humans that required medical treatment.

Mute swans can be confused with DE's only current native swan, the Tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*). Tundra swans migrate from the Arctic and can be seen feeding in fields from Nov. to Mar., while Mute swans stay in the area year-round. Tundra swans have black bills with a yellow spot at the base, instead of an orange bill like the Mute Swan.



## QUICK FACTS

- Native to much of Eurasia
- Brought to US for ornamental purposes
- Large, white waterfowl with orange bill and black skin around eyes
- Extremely territorial and aggressive
- Consume up to 8lbs of submerged aquatic vegetation daily

