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All Swans Are Beautiful

by Ken McConnell

A pair of swans swimming gracefully on a farm pond provides a beautiful view for persons of all ages. At a time when farm ponds are becoming so popular, most are relatively unmanaged. Many are becoming choked with vegetation. Swans can be the practical answer to these

problems as they relish this vegetation.

The fact that swans are vegetarians is cause for new attention being given to them as biological control of plant life. Surface scum and a majority of submerged aquatic plants are among the favorite food of a swan. This eliminates the need

Mute Swans in graceful harmony.

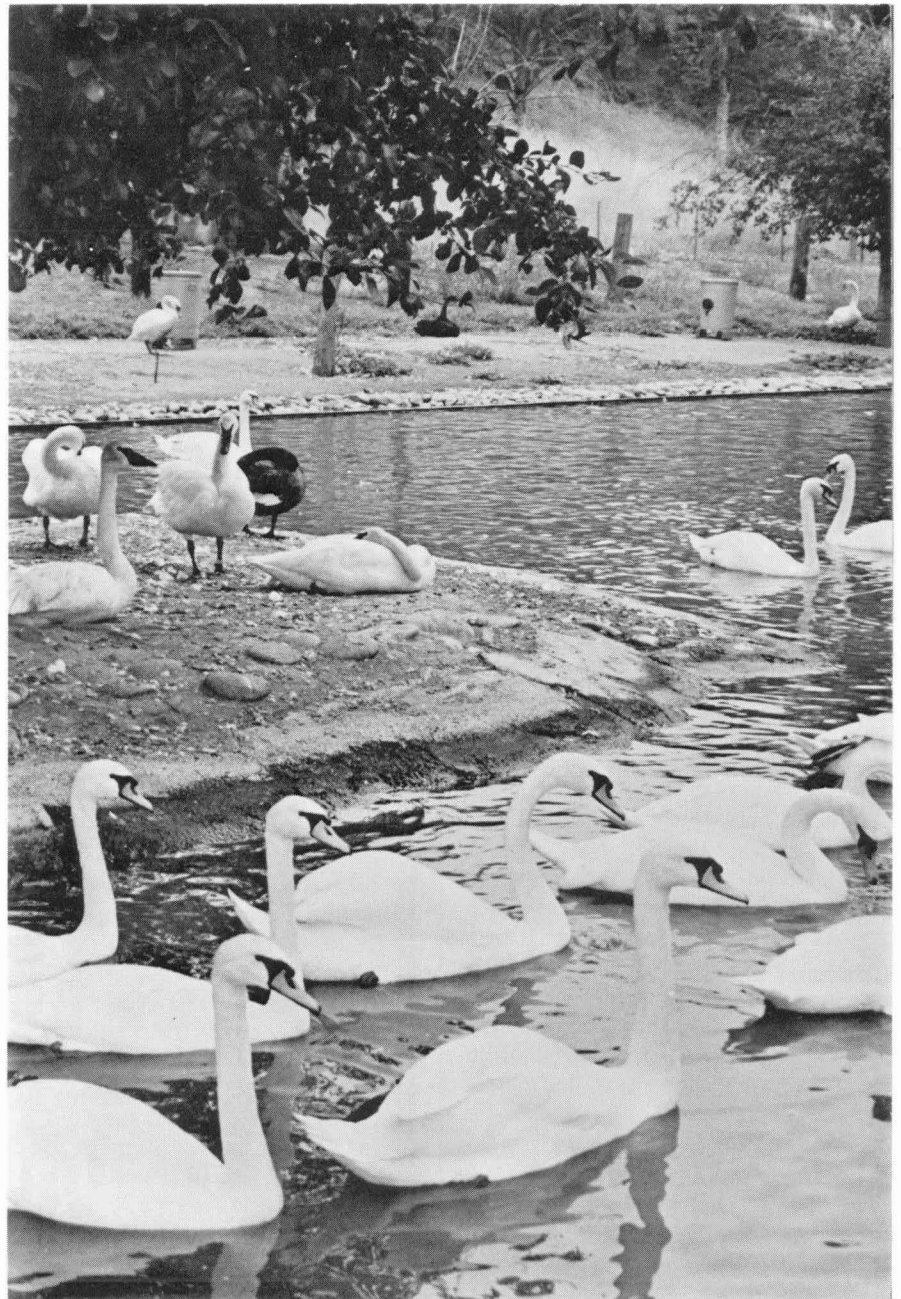


Photo by Ken McConnell

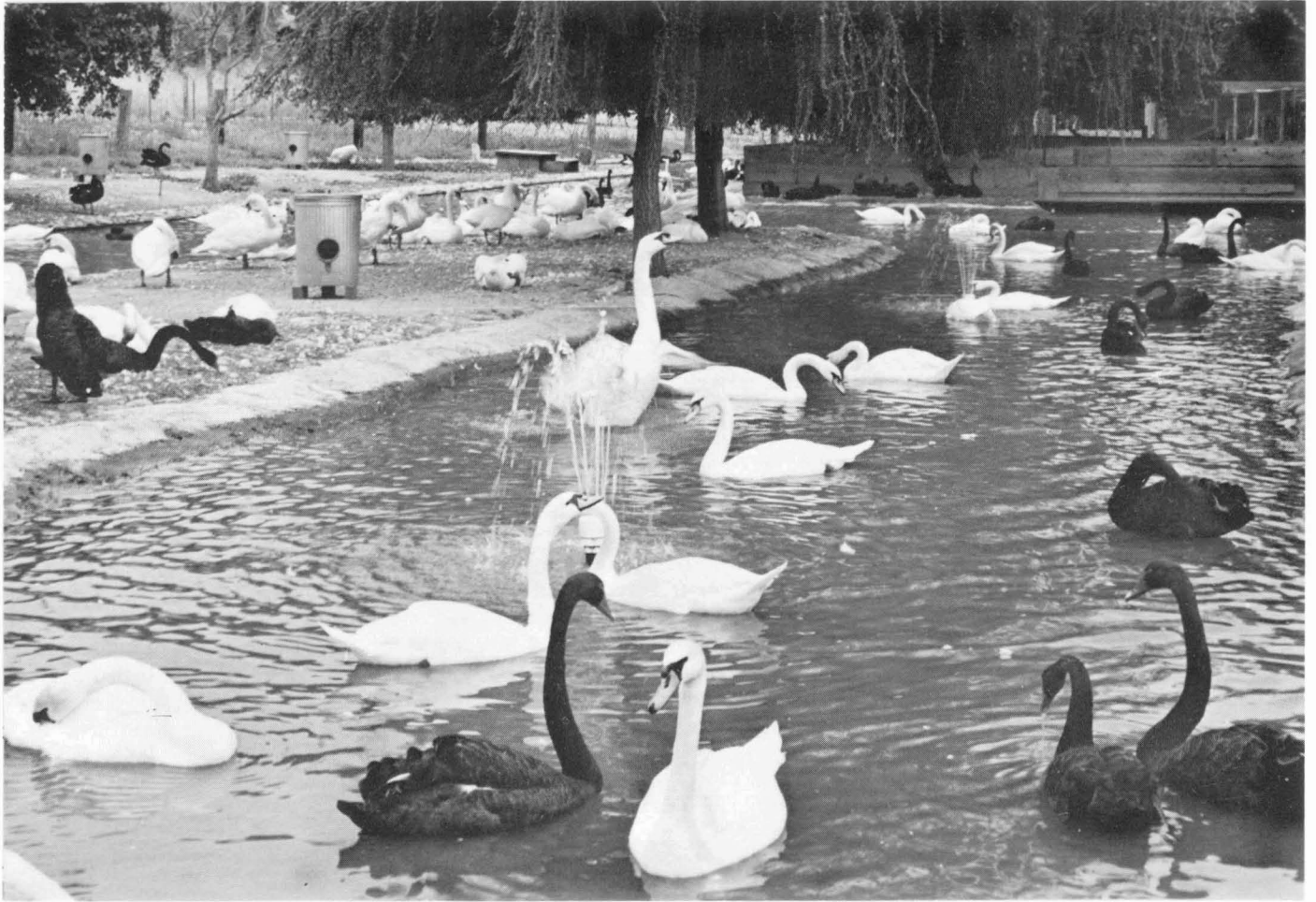


Photo by Ken McConnell

Not every back yard can accommodate ponds and islands like this, but even a modest pond can be very lovely.

to use chemicals and herbicides that are sometimes detrimental. The swans physical activity on the surface of a pond helps give the pond a clean look because air and surface tension lose their hold on plant material. Some fish hatcheries are using swans in their pools to control algae, so in addition to their beauty, the cost is off-set by their functional attributes.

Those of us who keep and raise waterfowl sooner or later come to the conclusion that our collection should include swans. The only question in our minds is which species is best suited to our particular situation. I hesitate to recommend a particular species as the choice of bird is largely a matter of personal preference. The size and location of the pond in relation to one's dwelling is a factor which probably should be taken into consideration.

On a large pond which is some distance from one's home, the large white

Mutes might be the better choice as their size and color make them easily seen. Their courtships, nesting habits, and care of their young are a constant source of interest and pleasure.

The Australian Blacks are probably the most friendly of all the swans. If one's preference really turns to this species, it is a beautiful choice. In the mild climate zones, all the Blacks will produce two clutches of cygnets a year, and some will raise three or even four clutches. The cygnets are unusually hardy and easy to raise so if one is a beginner at keeping swans, the Blacks would be a good choice to start with.

An added advantage with the Blacks is that they can easily and successfully be raised on a very small amount of space so for those who do not have that lovely one

acre pond, a small man-made cement one will do very nicely. One of the best features of building one's own small pond is that it can be placed near one's home and the birds can readily be watched at all times.

The Blacks are especially active and talkative, their voice is musical and pleasant, so they are always a focal point of interest. Their black ruffled feathers, bright red bill and proud strutting walk add a real touch of glamour to any back yard garden.

The Blacknecks, too, are easily kept in a very small amount of space. As they prefer to spend the major portion of their time in the water, they require very little land space. With a little thought given to the landscaping of their area, an ordinary back yard can be turned into an exotic garden. A fence only two feet high will keep any of the species in their own area of the yard. One does not need to give the entire space over to the birds or erect high or unsightly barricades to contain them.

The Blacknecks are probably the most shy and retiring of all the species of

swan, and their cygnets are somewhat more delicate than either the Mutes or Blacks, but they certainly are not difficult to raise. The young cygnets spend the major part of their first few weeks of life riding about on their parents back. They are kept warm, dry and safe snuggled under one of their parents wings, slipping off for only brief intervals for food and water. If Blacknecks are your choice, be prepared for a steady stream of visitors arriving to watch your swans caring for their downy white babies.

Good nutrition is the key factor to good health, and for swans a well balanced diet is one of mixed grains which have a total protein content of 14 to 16 per cent. Most feed mills make up a prepared pelletized feed for game birds to which vitamins and minerals have been added which adequately meets the swans requirements.

A swans favorite food is the natural grass and vegetation found on the waters' edge, and for those who have an ample supply of nature's own food available, the question of feed is made easy. They will pretty much take care of themselves. As food availability and its' nutritional value varies with each water area, it is

best to supplement this natural feed with a mixture of grains and pelletized game bird chow. For those of us who have no natural feed available, the pelletized feed available at the feed mill serves equally well. I like to supplement this with lettuce trimmings also as the swans truly enjoy this green feed and it adds needed fiber to their diet.

All species of swan are monogamous and mate for life. Their display of genuine affection for each other is readily observed by even the most casual observer. They definitely will accept a new mate, though, if one of the pair is lost.

The male, or cob, is the nest builder. A small island is a preferred nesting site if it is available. If not, a site or nest house near the waters edge is usually selected.

Once the nesting site has been chosen, the cob will use his feet to scratch out a shallow indentation in the earth and then proceed to gather up any available nesting material. Leaves, twigs and small branches are gathered. Large reeds and grass are preferred but a good meadow hay works equally well. The pen contributes her share of the effort by rearranging the nest to suit herself.

The pen lays her large eggs, one every other day, until she has completed her clutch of five to eight eggs and then settles down to an incubation period of 35 to 37 days. The cob remains close by to guard and protect his lady and their nest. In the case of the Blacks, the cob takes his turn at incubating the eggs while the female goes to water and feed.

All swans are watchful and protective parents. The cygnets are kept in the nest for a day or two after hatching, or until they are completely dry and have gained a little strength. They are then taken to the pond by their parents and a sharp watch is kept over the young for the first few weeks of their life.

What species of swan should one keep? The selection should be made on the basis of one's own personal desires. Although the question of available space and water does enter into the decision, it is perfectly possible to keep any of the species on whatever size body of water that you have. It does take a little planning to work out the best possible environment for the bird chosen, with the condition one has to work with. It can be beautifully and successfully done if one puts his mind to it. It is worth the effort ■

Mute and Black Swans lend variety to any pond.



Photo by Ken McConnell.

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