



February 28, 2024

**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB0957: Natural Resources – Hunting – Tundra Swans**

**Position: Oppose HB0957**

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and Safe Skies Maryland (SSM) strongly opposes HB0957, and urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report. This bill would establish a hunt for Tundra Swans, and a lottery system for that hunt.

MOS, ABC, and SSM feel a hunt for Tundra Swans is inopportune, and unwarranted. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) winter surveys of waterfowl have shown a steady and significant decline in the wintering population from 1970 to present. Numbers have declined from about 50,000 in the late 1960s to as low as 6000 in 2021. Numbers climbed slightly in 2022 to about 9000, but that hardly reverses the steady downward trend.

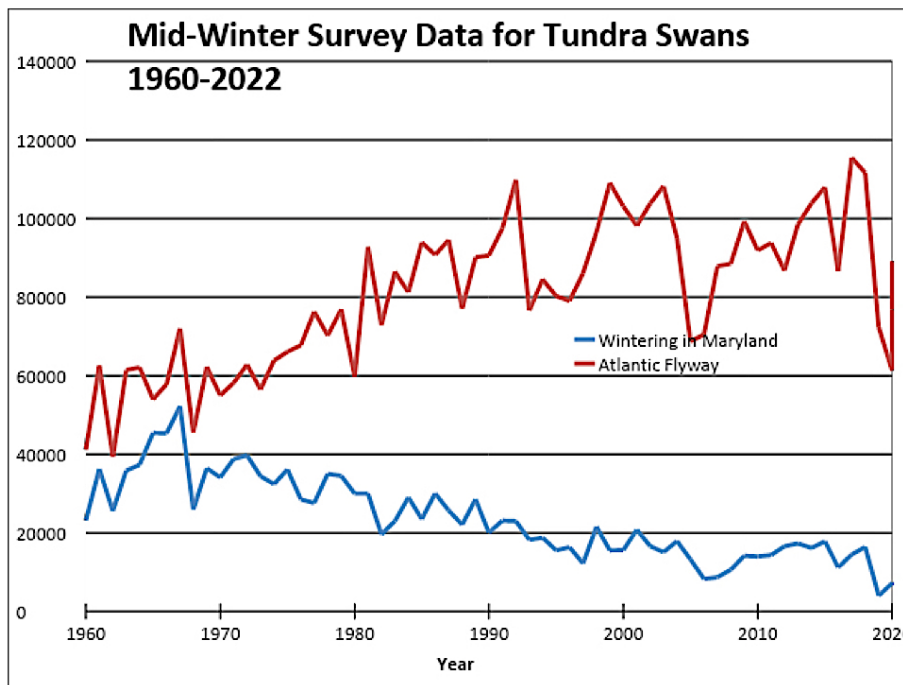


Figure 1 Mid-winter Survey results for Maryland and Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swans (Atlantic Flyway Databook and committee reports)

The percentage of total Atlantic Flyway Tundra Swans wintering in Maryland has fallen from a peak of over 80% in the 1960s to around 10% in 2020. With declining numbers in Maryland, another source of mortality for the swans cannot be allowed. DNR also notes the Tundra Swans present virtually no threat to agriculture or aviation.<sup>1</sup>

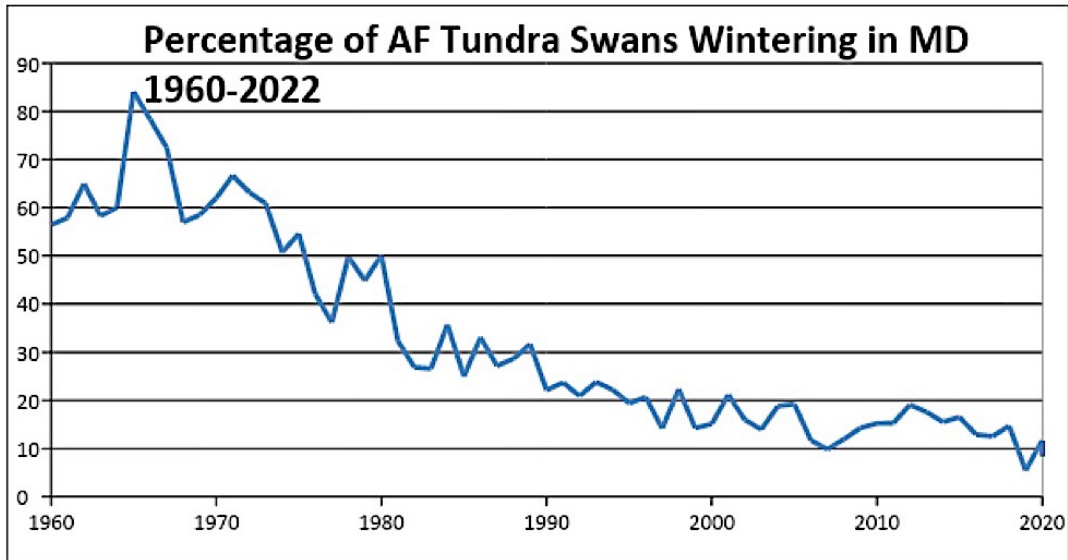


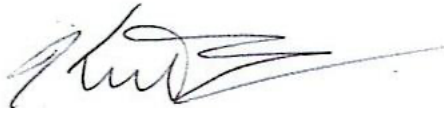
Figure 2. Percentage of Tundra Swans Wintering in Maryland (Atlantic Flyway Databook and AF Committee Reports)

Tundra Swans are an iconic species, a part of the winter landscape in Maryland. The public enjoys seeing numbers of them at Eastern Neck and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuges, or on harvested fields on the Eastern Shore. Birders who travel to see swans spend money on gas, food, souvenirs, etc., generating economic activity on both the Eastern and Western Shores in the off-season. Furthermore, the Tundra Swan is displayed on the logo of our organization.

Another concern about permitting Tundra Swan hunting is the increasing numbers of Trumpeter Swans in Maryland. Indeed, Trumpeters have successfully nested in Maryland since at least 2022. Two pairs have produced young in Anne Arundel County, another pair on Hart-Miller Island in Baltimore County has also produced young. Trumpeters are difficult for even experienced birders to tell from Tundras. We submit a hunter in a blind, with just seconds to react, is even less capable of distinguishing a Trumpeter from a Tundra. Trumpeter Swans are a protected species in both the United States and Canada.

Mos, ABC and SSM do not oppose waterfowl hunting. We recognize hunting as a valid wildlife management tool and form of recreation. A hunting season for Tundra Swans, however, is not warranted at this time due to declining wintering population and concerns of protecting the nascent Trumpeter Swan population. We urge the Committee to issue an unfavorable report.

Sincerely,



Kurt R. Schwarz  
Conservation Chair Emeritus  
Maryland Ornithological Society



E. Hardy Kern III  
Director of Government Relations  
American Bird Conservancy



Mark Southerland PhD  
Legislative Director  
Safe Skies Maryland

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Tundra Swan Hunting Season, 2023,  
[https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2022/2022\\_82\(b\).pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/JCR/2022/2022_82(b).pdf)