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Sent: Monday, February 26, 2024 11:09 AM

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Cc: johnsojda@gknowmx.com

Subject: HB957 Natural Resources - Hunting - Tundra Swans.

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, Bill Sponsors, and local House Delegates,

My simple message is that I would like to express my full support for HB957 Natural Resources – Hunting – Tundra Swans.

I would also like to offer a much more detailed message:

I first became aware of HB957 when I received an email from the Maryland Ornithological Society's Conservation Chair urging me to express my *disapproval* for this bill. I suspect that you and other members of the house may receive a number of emails from MOS members expressing passionate disapproval in response to this call to action. I would like to add some factual balance to any such responses you may get and offer you some reference material should you have more involved dialog with HB957 opponents.

I can respect that some individuals are opposed to hunting. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts. It is an unforced error by MOS, and all who follow MOS's call to action without diligence, to pollute an honest feeling-based position with unfounded assertions:

1. The numbers of swans wintering in Maryland have declined in recent years; any hunting will put further pressure on them.
2. Trumpeter Swans and Tundra Swans are hard to tell apart, even for expert birders. Therefore, it is very likely that hunters would mistake protected Trumpeter Swans for Tundra Swans.
3. They do minimal damage (some feeding on winter grains).
4. And, finally, these are magnificent birds that pair for life, and deserve better from Maryland than to be brought down by shotgun blasts.

As a very serious birder based in Montgomery County, MD (<https://ebird.org/profile/MjA5NDgwOA/US-MD-031>, <https://ebird.org/top100?region=Montgomery+County&locInfo.regionCode=US-MD-031&year=2024&rankedBy=spp>) I belong to both the Montgomery County Bird Club as well as MOS, The Audubon Society, and I support The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. But I am also a member of Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, and The Ruffed Grouse Society. As a member of these organizations, I am aware of the great works that hunters perform in volunteering their time and money to support the welfare of not only the birds that they hunt, but of all the species that are part of the habitats that they rehabilitate, maintain, and help flourish. At leadership and local levels, hunters and birders realize the wisdom and value of reaching across the table for the common good. One example is Ducks Unlimited partnering with Audubon for the good of birds. <https://www.audubon.org/news/why->

[birders-and-waterfowl-hunters-are-natural-allies](#) Responsible stewards work with all stakeholders that their endeavor affects.

It is a shame when some birders, in leadership roles no less, take a careless stance when they have the opportunity to work with serious hunters, wildlife agencies, and government officials to promote the welfare of species we all care so much about.

Point by point, here are facts that oppose the talking points that MOS has offered:

1. Tundra Swan numbers are not declining.
 - a. According to the [most recent survey](#) by The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Migratory Bird Management (based right here in Laurel, MD no less), Tundra Swan numbers are *not* declining (pg 39).
 - b. According to The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Birds of the World" site (login needed):
<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/tunswa/cur/introduction?login>

i. Conservation Status – Least Concern

ORDER Anseriformes FAMILY Anatidae GENUS Cygnus

SPECIES
Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

R. J. Limpert, S.
Version: 1.0

Introduction
Identification
Plumages, Molts, and Structure
Systematics
Distribution
Habitat
Movements and Migration
Diet and Foraging
Sounds and Vocal Behavior
Behavior
Breeding

Conservation and Management

Conservation Status **LC** Least Concern

Not globally threatened (**Least Concern**). Sizeable populations remain of both races. Winter counts produced 169,300 individuals of nominate *columbianus*; commonest swan in N America, with both W & E populations increasing (latter reaching c. 100,000 birds in 2000) [Kear 2005](#). Race *bewickii* has recently increased in tundra of NE European sector of Russia.

Effects of Human Activity

Shooting

The most direct human impact on Tundra Swans has been in the form of an annual hunting season since 1962 on the western wintering population and 1984 on the eastern wintering population. Hunting is authorized during fall migration in Alaska, Montana, Nevada, North and South Dakota, and Utah, and on the wintering grounds in New

- ii. There are already several regulated hunting seasons:

Effects of Human Activity

Shooting

The most direct human impact on Tundra Swans has been in the form of an annual hunting season since 1962 on the western wintering population and 1984 on the eastern wintering population. Hunting is authorized during fall migration in Alaska, Montana, Nevada, North and South Dakota, and Utah, and on the wintering grounds in New Jersey, N. Carolina, and Virginia (Serie and Bartonek 1991a). Hunting is by permit only and each permit holder is allowed to kill one swan per season. During 1979-1988, the number of permits issued to harvest western wintering Tundra Swans averaged 3,552 (range 3,500-3,600); based on the return of hunter questionnaires, an annual average of 1,075 swans were killed and retrieved (600-1,619) and another 215 swans killed but not retrieved (66-377). During 1985-1988, the average number of permits issued to harvest eastern wintering Tundra Swans was 6,381 (6,120-7,094) resulting in an average of 2,601 swans killed and retrieved (2,343-2,797) and another 292 killed but not retrieved (260-324; Serie and Bartonek 1991a). Of dead birds that were analyzed, 44% contained lead shot.

The hunting of Tundra Swans has been justified due to population increases, concerns about damage to agricultural crops from field-feeding swans, and to provide a trophy hunting experience (Serie and Bartonek 1991a), although these authors concluded that in most portions of their range, Tundra Swans posed few social or

iii. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service already have management plans in place

Management

Not globally threatened (Least Concern). Possible race *jankowskii* included in CITES II.

Tundra Swans are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service as two populations, the Eastern Population (EP) and the Western Population (WP), based on their respective wintering locations in North America (see Distribution). Management plans for the two populations establish target population sizes of 80,000 and 60,000 respectively for the EP and WP (Can. Wildl. Serv. and U.S. Fish Wildl. Serv. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service 1986). Hunting by permit is the technique used to achieve the desired population levels and will not be allowed if the three-year average wintering population falls below 60,000 for the EP and 40,000 for the WP (Serie and Bartonek 1991a).

In Europe, declines of Tundra Swans lead to a Bewick's Swan action planning workshop in St Petersburg in Sept 2009, which attempted to identify major threats (including weather and habitat changes) and to develop the monitoring, research and conservation work required to halt and reverse the decline Rees and Beekman 2010.

- c. But let's take a look at what might happen when a species subject to hunting regulations falls into decline. In general, wildlife officials have a stream of revenue from hunters to survey species population and offer forecasts. Hunting seasons and bag limits are adjusted accordingly. Hunters, seeking to maximize their hunting opportunities work closely with wildlife officials and local property owners across a species' entire range to improve habitat in an effort to strengthen a species numbers and overall health. When they are successful, there are more birds overall—enough to hunt and enough to enjoy watching. All birds die eventually, perhaps a few more will succumb to hunting pressures, but far more birds will benefit from the greater good performed. The language of this Bill is clear enough to indicate that Federal agencies will dictate the amount of hunting allowed; it will not just be a free-for-all.
2. Trumpeter Swan flock demographics not negatively affected by Tundra Swan hunting
<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/truswa/cur/introduction>

ORDER Anseriformes FAMILY Anatidae GENUS *Cygnus*

SPECIES

Trumpeter Swan *Cygnus buccinator*

Introduction

Conservation and Management

Identification

Plumages, Molts, and Structure

Conservation Status **LC** Least Concern

Shooting

Original declines and local extirpation were due in part to trade in swan skins and quills (3, 87, 89) and to excessive market (23), subsistence (3) and recreational (343, 110) hunting. Trumpeter swan adults deemed "very tough and hardly edible" (343), but cygnets were "excellent" and "very good eating" (343, 110). Hunting is currently controlled by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918) and not currently legal anywhere in North America. Unintentional and malicious shooting remains a problem (188, 6, 306, 307, 206, 174, 80). Trumpeter Swans are probably more vulnerable to shooting in part because they tend to fly lower (51 m ± 4 SD on foraging flights) and in smaller groups than Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) (344, 215, 237, CDM). A very few Trumpeter Swans are mistakenly shot during legal Tundra Swan hunting (345), but not enough to negatively affect flock demographics. However, incidental harvest may affect natural range expansion by sacrificing pioneering birds developing new migratory traditions (244).

Pesticides and Other Contaminants

3. Grain damage may be minimal based on studies like this:

This is a preview. [Log in through your library.](#)

Effect of Tundra Swan Grazing on Winter Wheat in North Carolina

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Abstract.—Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) grazing on winter wheat (*Triticum durum*) were studied using 61 sets of paired plots (one enclosure, one subject to grazing) in fields near a major wintering area in North Carolina during 1995–1996. Aboveground biomass, number of seed heads, and seed head mass were determined for each plot and used as measures of grain yield; plant height and leaf damage on each plot were used to assess grazing intensity. Tundra Swans reduced aboveground biomass by 12% and seed head mass by 11% in grazed plots compared to enclosure plots. More blades were grazed and plant height was reduced in grazed plots compared to enclosure plots in each month after plot deployment, with the greatest reduction in plant height (28%) occurring in February, and a final reduction of 6% at the time of harvest in June. However, these differences in crop yield and plant height occurred only in plots on sanctuary fields, in which swans can feed without disturbance from farmers or hunters, but not in plots on non-sanctuary fields.

Key Words.—Crop damage, crop yield, *Cygnus columbianus columbianus*, effects of grazing, Tundra Swan, winter wheat.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Effect of Tundra Swan Grazing on Winter Wheat in North Carolina

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<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1522349>

4. No evidence that Swans pair for life:

<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/tunswa/cur/behavior#sex>

Pair Bond: Nature And Duration

Pair bond maintained year-round. Specifics of pair bond thought to be similar across entire range.

In Palearctic populations, Tundra Swans form permanent pair bonds at 2–3 yr of age and first breed 1–2 yr later (Scott 1978a). Divorce while both members are alive is uncommon (2%); it is also uncommon for pair members to winter on different sites. Before pairing permanently, a young swan may form one or more sequential, loose alliances with a member of the opposite sex (Scott 1978a). in bewickii, if mate is lost, other bird may take up to nine years to re-pair, or as little as 12 months (mean 2-6 years; Kear 2005). European subspecies, not NA.

Pair Bond: Displays

The following descriptions adopted from Hawkins (Hawkins 1986b).

(1) Forward Call: Head and neck extended horizontally, held parallel to ground at a height approximately halfway between the ground and the shoulder position when in an upright, relaxed posture.

In summary, based on MOS’s own talking points, it is a shame they didn’t do their homework. If there are objective published facts to the contrary of those presented here, so be it, but I respectfully wait for such information to emerge from MOS.

The other aspect of this subject that I would like make note of is the economic impact that passing this Bill could be expected to have. I don’t have exact figures but I am sure someone does, that speak to the millions of dollars a year that hunting pumps into the Maryland economy. Waterfowl hunting in the Chesapeake Bay region has historical and cultural significance. While hunting is a passionate hobby for many, it is a vital livelihood for others. Proceeds from hunters’ licensing dollars and taxes on spending on hunting materials goes directly to maintain State and Federal Gamelands—Gamelands that MOS birders use year around as much, or more, than hunters and yet birdwatchers pay nothing for the privilege. I do not see MOS leadership urging fellow birders to purchase hunting licenses, not to hunt, but solely to support Gameland maintenance.

I support HB957.

R/

John

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