



## Mute Swans: ‘What’s The Big Deal?’

[September 26, 2013 9:21 AM](#) [Martha Stoelting](#)  [Contact Author](#)

“What’s the big deal about the swans?” is a question many people have asked this year.

Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services came to the North Webster Community Center to explain about the mute swans, an invasive species in Indiana.

Most of the swans that live year-round on our local lakes are mute swans. Swans native to the region, the trumpeter and the tundra, migrate through the area in the fall and spring and do not remain permanently on the lakes.

Though beautiful creatures that have no natural predators, they are native to Europe and Asia. They were released in the United States in the late 1800s as an ornamental species, but the damages they can cause to area lakes and streams can be anything but beautiful.

Billed as an educational presentation on mute swans, a standing room only crowd of more than 100 from Kosciusko, Noble and Whitley counties listened politely and intently to the information presented by Judy Loven, Dan Young and Carl Voglewede of the USDA. Also answering questions after the presentation were Adam Phelps, Bloomington, Indiana Department of Natural Resources biologist, and locally stationed DNR officer Lt. John Karris.

Unfortunately, mute swans can threaten humans, especially during the March through May nesting season. They endanger native wildlife and destroy fish habitats. A single swan is able to eat between 4 and 8 pounds of aquatic vegetation per day and in the process can uproot 20 pounds of plants. Also, mute swan manure is not good for water quality.

With a dramatic increase in population of up to 10 percent annually during the last couple of years in Indiana, some lakes, such as Backwater Lake, are experiencing real problems with a decrease in native wildlife and fish such as muskie and northern pike.

“We are looking for a balanced way to control and manage mute swans, not completely destroy them. This will take time, but the process has been put in motion,” explained Loven. Population studies of mute swans are currently underway by the agriculture department in the Hoosier state. The information will be turned over to the state DNR, in charge of Indiana public waterways.

Organizations such as the National Audubon Society, Ducks Unlimited and the National Bird Conservatory are supportive of the mute swan population being managed to protect native species it was pointed out.

Many in the audience expressed frustration with the DNR permit process. The permit to kill mute swans is issued by the DNR to an individual, but it was suggested by Phelps and Karris groups or organizations, such as lake associations, back those getting the permits.

Several residents of Loon Lake commented they had an administrative judge overrule a permit to destroy mute swans and expressed frustration with the entire process.

Others in the audience objected to the manner of killing of mute swans. It was explained while their eggs can be addled or oiled, it is dangerous to approach a mute swan nest and killing the adults has proven a more effective way to control the population.

“What can we do about the mute swan problem?” asked Diana Castell, a Lake Wawasee resident. It was suggested to not only contact state legislators to voice a position on mute swans, but to report any incidents to the state DNR 24-hour hotline so a record is established. That number is 812-837-9536. To talk with the DNR Fish and Wildlife Division, call 317-232-4080.

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## About Martha Stoelting

Martha Stoelting is the editor of HOME Indoor Outdoor Living and a columnist and writer for other The Papers' publications. She and husband Paul live in Syracuse and are the parents of three adult children.

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*Indiana MMA*

I don't think a Lake association should have the authority to overrule a permit of any kind; especially one that affects the biological health of our native environment. Stick to collecting your dues and having pancake breakfasts. Leave the environmental issues to those who are educated on the issue.

- *Gary T*

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Serve them up for Thanksgiving Dinner! (And I don't think septic systems are good for water

quality either.)

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