

# Mute Swan

## *Cygnus olor*

A native of Europe, Mute Swans were initially introduced to North America along the Atlantic coast. A small feral population was also established in Michigan beginning with a single pair near Traverse City in 1920. They eventually became established within the northern lower peninsula with scattered pairs elsewhere in the state. By 1981, the entire Michigan population was estimated to be 1440 swans (Payne 1983). As their numbers increased and additional swans were released, Mute Swans expanded into adjacent states and provinces, a trend that is still evident today. Mute Swans have nested in Ontario since 1958 with approximately 120 breeding swans scattered along the lower Great Lakes (Cadman et al. 1987). Scattered pairs have also appeared in northern Illinois and Indiana, although these breeding populations are still small.

Within Ohio, feral Mute Swans were initially known as winter visitors. The first published record was in 1936, corresponding with the rapid expansion of the Michigan population, but Mute Swans did not regularly winter in Ohio until the early 1960s (Peterjohn 1989a). In addition to these feral individuals, occasional Mute Swans were released or escaped from captivity. While some of these escaped swans survived in the wild for several years, they failed to establish a breeding population.

As Mute Swan populations expanded within the Great Lakes region during the 1980s, occasional summering swans were noted in the marshes along western Lake Erie. These records culminated in a nesting attempt at Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge (Lucas County) during 1987, the only confirmed nesting record for feral Mute Swans during the Atlas Project. In addition, released swans were reported from Buckeye Lake and Senecaville Lake with at least one nesting attempt from the latter location. As was true for other birds of released origins, these released swans were not indicated on the Atlas map.

Subsequently, a few additional breeding pairs of Mute Swans have been discovered along western Lake Erie. They appear to be on the verge of establishing a breeding population within these marshes. Should this population continue to expand, breeding swans may eventually expand to other portions of Ohio.

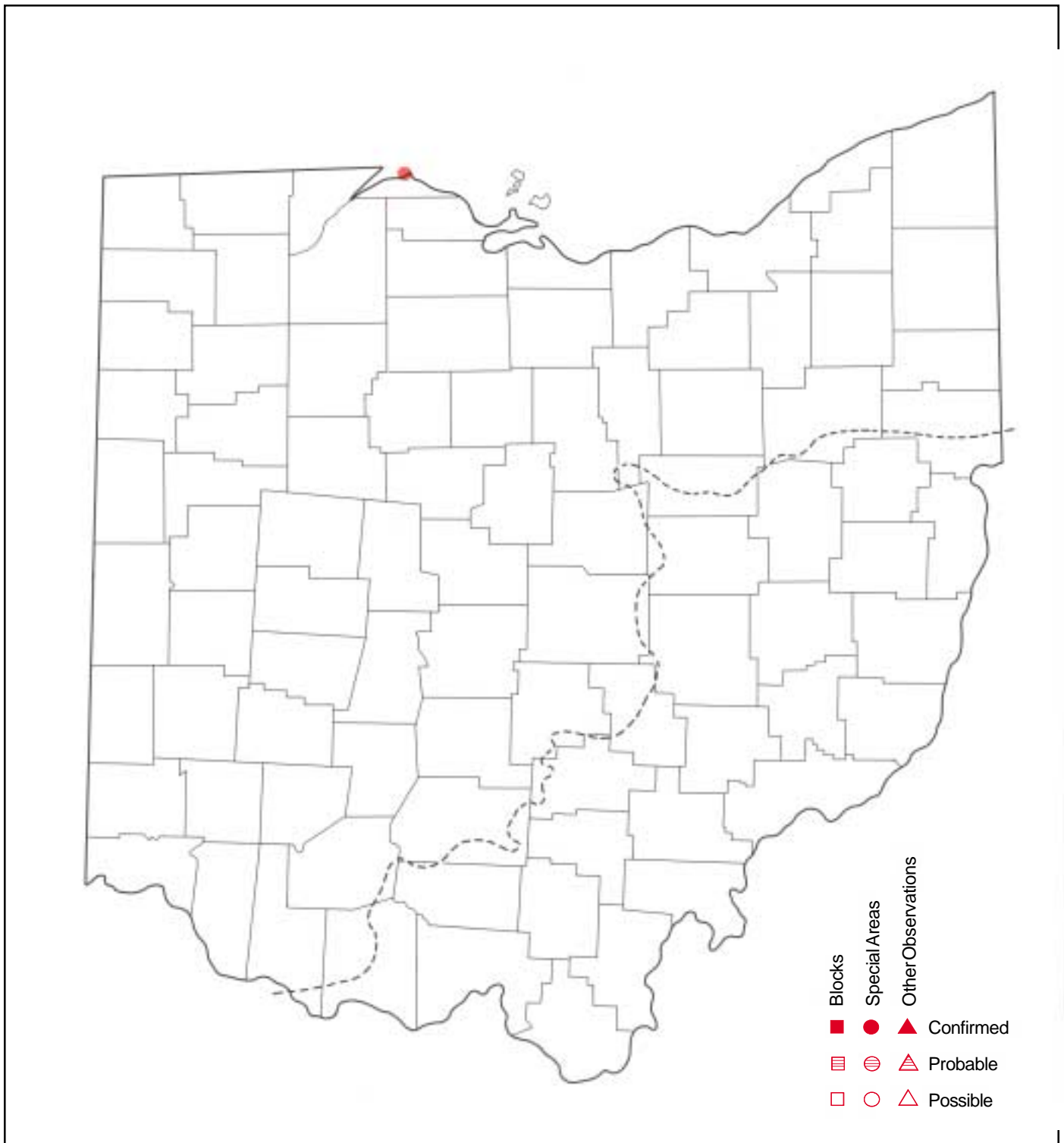
The breeding biology of Mute Swans in Ohio is expected to be similar to that reported elsewhere in the Great Lakes region. They frequently nest in large marshes dominated by cattails and other emergent vegetation. They also readily nest within the marshy borders of large ponds and lakes (Palmer 1976). While some pairs prefer undisturbed breeding sites, Mute Swans are not adverse to nesting close to humans.

Their nests are large mounds of vegetation, usually placed 50–300+ feet from shore (Peck and James 1983). Mats of floating vegetation and muskrat houses are favorite nest sites. Some nests may be reused for several years. The first clutches may be laid during the last week of March but most are produced during



Mike Williams - ODNR Photographer

April. Peck and James (1983) cite Ontario egg dates as late as June 29. After an incubation period of 34–38 days, the first cygnets may appear during the first half of May (Palmer 1976). The young swans do not fledge until they are four or five months old. Unlike other species of swans, Mute Swan families normally break up during late fall (Cadman et al. 1987). During the nesting season, male Mute Swans can be very aggressive in the defense of their nest sites. They regularly chase waterfowl away from their territories and may even physically attack humans if they approach too close to the nest. As a result of this behavior and their deleterious effects on native nesting waterfowl populations, feral populations of Mute Swans have become nuisances in most of their North American range (Reese 1975).



**Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region**

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	—	—	—	—
Till Plain	271	—	—	—	—
Ill. Till Plain	46	—	—	—	—
Glaciated Plateau	140	—	—	—	—
Unglaciated Plateau	212	—	—	—	—

**Summary of Breeding Status**

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
<b>Total</b>	—	—
Confirmed	—	—
Probable	—	—
Possible	—	—