**YVCipedia POULTRY**

Swan Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Swans are among the largest waterfowl in North America and are best known for their graceful posture, long necks, and strong pair bonds. Commonly seen species in captivity include the **Mute Swan**, **Trumpeter Swan**, and **Black Swan**. While stunning, swans are not typical pets—they are more often kept in parks, on private estates, or in sanctuary settings.

At YVC, we occasionally work with clients who care for ornamental or rescued swans. These birds can live 20–30 years or more in proper conditions and require substantial outdoor space, a clean water source, and species-specific care to thrive. Though beautiful and often gentle with familiar people, they are powerful birds capable of delivering strong bites or wing strikes if threatened.

## **Housing & Environment**

Swans are semi-aquatic and must have access to a natural or artificial pond with open swimming space. Without water access, their leg and foot health can deteriorate, and natural behaviors like dabbling, preening, and swimming are disrupted.

We recommend a pond or lake large enough to allow full swimming and gentle take-off for flighted individuals, or at minimum, a secure, predator-proof enclosure with a pond feature that allows for immersion. Swans are grazing birds and benefit from access to pasture or shoreline vegetation during the day.

Shelter should be available to protect them from extreme cold, heavy winds, and predators. In Maine, overwintering swans may need supplemental protection if their pond freezes solid—heated water areas or access to a barn-like structure can help prevent frostbite or hypothermia.

Swans are territorial, especially during breeding season, and may act aggressively toward unfamiliar animals or people, so thoughtful fencing and signage are often appropriate.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Swans are natural grazers and dabblers, feeding on aquatic vegetation, tender grasses, and small invertebrates. At YVC, we recommend offering a consistent diet that mimics their natural intake, with a focus on balanced waterfowl nutrition.

Their diet should primarily include:

* A formulated **waterfowl pellet or maintenance ration**, floating or crumbled, as the dietary base
* Grazed **fresh grass or aquatic plants** like duckweed and pondweed
* Occasional supplementation with **romaine lettuce, dandelion greens**, or **chopped vegetables**
* Grit available free-choice for digestive support

Avoid feeding high-calorie breads, crackers, or poultry corn mixes—these are nutritionally poor and can lead to obesity or foot problems. Access to clean, open water during feeding is important for digestion and to reduce impaction risk.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Swans are intelligent, observant birds that often form strong pair bonds, both with mates and in some cases with caretakers. Though generally calm when undisturbed, they are not suited for regular handling and can become quite defensive if approached unexpectedly—especially during nesting or molting.

We encourage consistent, predictable routines. Swans quickly learn their feeding schedule and preferred resting areas. When needed, they can be gently herded or guided, but direct handling should be minimized unless necessary for veterinary care.

It’s important to note that they are seasonal nesters and may defend large territories during the spring and early summer. Families with children or pets should use caution during these months.

## **Enrichment**

While swans don’t require toys or interactive stimuli like parrots, their well-being is closely tied to environmental variety and space. Grazing areas, open water, variable shoreline terrain, and the ability to forage naturally all provide necessary mental and physical engagement.

A rotating pond layout or managed aquatic vegetation can keep their surroundings dynamic. Observing wildlife, social interactions with flockmates, and seasonal weather changes often provide natural enrichment on their own.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Swans are relatively hardy when given proper space, nutrition, and water access, but they are susceptible to certain preventable conditions. At YVC, we recommend **annual exams and fecal parasite screening** for most swans, at least one from the flock, and especially those kept in mixed-species environments or small ponds.

Common health concerns include:

* **Pododermatitis (foot injuries)** from rough terrain or poor hygiene
* **Lead toxicity**, particularly in birds exposed to old fishing tackle or shot
* **Parasites**, both internal and external, especially in shallow or stagnant water bodies
* **Nutritional imbalances**, such as obesity or deficiencies from poor diets
* **Injuries** from aggressive encounters or territorial disputes

Routine observation of swimming behavior, droppings, and activity levels is often the first clue to a developing health issue. Swans showing signs of lethargy, lameness, or neck droop should be evaluated promptly.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Swans are protected under federal law in many areas; always check local regulations before acquiring or relocating them
* They form strong pair bonds and often mate for life
* Despite their size and grace, swans can fly (if not pinioned) and will use flight to escape predators or explore new territory
* Mute swans are not truly silent but are less vocal than Trumpeter or Whooper swans
* Males (cobs) are generally larger than females (pens) and may be more territorial

## **Supplies Checklist**

To support healthy, long-lived swans, we recommend:

* A **large pond** or water source, ideally with moving water to prevent stagnation
* **Waterfowl pellets** with appropriate protein and fat content
* Safe **aquatic and pasture vegetation**
* Winter shelter or windbreak
* Access to clean, unfrozen water year-round
* Free-choice **grit and oyster shell**
* Predator-proof **fencing** or boundaries
* Net or large pen for safe capture during care
* Travel carrier or crate large enough for transport
* Annual veterinary wellness care with fecal testing and occasional bloodwork

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*