

WHAT WHITE BIRD IS IT?

Kenue Park

The two swans that live in the Kenue Park wetland are both rehabilitated and flightless. The wetland has an aerator to keep a patch of open water all year and also has a feeding station for the cold winter months.

It's a big, white bird paddling on that body of water.

But what exactly is it?

Most likely, it's a trumpeter swan if you're in Iowa. The trumpeter swan is native to the state and is the biggest waterfowl native to the U.S., its wingspan reaching up to 8 feet — that's taller than Yao Ming, who was only 7 feet six inches.

Prior to settlers coming to Iowa, these swans nested throughout the state, but wetland drainage and unregulated hunting led the species to endangered status. After a concentrated effort to reintroduce the species back to Iowa by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and local conservation organizations, the trumpeter swan now has a conservation status of species of least concern.

As popular as it is today, many people still don't exactly know what a trumpeter swan looks like or how it differs from other swans and even a snow goose.

Here are some differentiating factors between swans and a snow goose.

Difference No. 1 — Bill

Perhaps the easiest way to tell species of swans apart is by their bill. A trumpeter swan has a black bill with a discreet red border on its lower mandible — the top of its bottom jaw. The tundra swan has a yellow mark at the top of its bill, right under its eye. The mute swan has an orange bill with a black knob on its forehead. The snow goose has a much stubbier pink bill with a black patch in the middle.

Difference No. 2 — Size

Size is an easy way to tell different species apart. As mentioned above, trumpeter swans are definitely the biggest with an 8-foot wingspan and a body that reaches up to 6 feet long.

Mute swans, which were introduced to the U.S. from Europe and Asia because of their looks, are almost as big with wingspans 82-94 inches and bodies 57 inches, but tundra swans are definitely smaller than both.

Tundra swans have wingspans 72-80 inches and 52-inch bodies.

Snow geese are much smaller with wings 36-44 inches wide and a 27-inch body.



Trumpeter swans



Tundra swan



Mute swan



Lesser snow goose



CONSERVATION BOARD

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Feeding video

You can learn about the Kenue Park swans and how they are fed throughout the winter by looking up the “Feeding the Kenue Park trumpeter swans” video on our website.

Difference No. 3 — Call

Each swan has a distinct call (check out this blog on our website to listen). A mute swan is less vocal than other swan species, although it is not completely mute, because its trachea goes straight into the lungs instead of being embedded in the sternum.

Difference No. 4 — Wings and neck

A snow goose can be told apart from all swan species because of its wings. Swans have all white wings with long, slender necks, while a snow goose has black primary feathers and a short neck.

When you take a close look, each swan is different than the other, and although people say snow geese look just like swans, they really are quite different.



Did you know?

Sometimes, like flamingoes, swans and other waterfowl will stand on one leg.

A study by two people at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia delved a little deeper into why flamingoes stand on one leg. “... the one-legged stance conserves body heat and that the principal reason for the phenomenon is thermoregulation. Among their statistical findings was the observation that the proportion of the pink birds that stand on one leg increases as water temperatures get cooler. Likewise, they noted that a flamingo on land is less likely to stand on one leg than one standing in water. The explanation is that having only one leg at a time in cold water reduces the rate of body heat loss. The converse observation, that most flamingos keep both legs in the water during hot weather, further supports the notion of thermoregulation.”