

# ANIMAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA

*"Promoting and protecting the rights of all animals."*

May 5, 2008

Leo Falcon, Site Manager  
Lake Eola Park  
City of Orlando - Parks Division  
1206 West Columbia Street  
Orlando, Florida 32805

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Cleveland Amory

Dear Mr. Falcon:

I am writing concerning the recently-announced plans by Orlando's Parks Division and a group of local swan fanciers to purchase and bring to Orlando for display on Lake Eola animals from every swan species—including trumpeter swans, Coscoroba Swans, Black-necked Swans, Bewick's Swan, and the Tundra Swan. Although a pair of Whooper Swans has already arrived at the Orlando airport, it is not too late to stop this poorly-hatched plan.

At a time when there is a growing awareness of the impacts nonnative species have on Florida's native wildlife, we believe it is irresponsible to introduce swans native to Europe, South America and Russia into the Florida ecosystem. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) considers swans such as Whooper Swans and Coscoroba Swans to be exotic species. The FWC has expressed concerns that nonnative swans may overgraze aquatic vegetation, displace native waterfowl and trample nests and nestlings of native birds.

We understand that one of the goals of your plan is to attract tourists to Lake Eola. Surely you are aware that Florida is a bird watching paradise, with well over 350 species of birds? It is not uncommon in Orlando's natural areas to see herons, ibis, egrets, limpkins and other wading birds, or ospreys, red-shouldered hawks and owls. If you are lucky, you may even spot threatened species like the sandhill crane or wood stork. Surely any one of these birds equals the beauty of a swan? We encourage you to explore ways to promote the viewing of Florida's native birds instead of turning Lake Eola into a zoo.

Swans can be aggressive, and have been known to "attack" humans when protecting their nests and young. In Lakeland in 2003, a 70-year old woman sued the city after she was attacked by an aggressive bird, and suffered a broken wrist when she fell trying to escape.

We also have concerns about the welfare of the swans. The swans at Lake Eola are known to have little fear of humans, leaving them susceptible to become victims of human cruelty. Elsewhere in Florida, swans have fallen

prey to feral cats, dogs and alligators, and suffered injuries from fishing hooks and golf balls. At Lake Morton in Lakeland, a city well-known for its swans, swans have been killed by speeding cars, shot with pellet guns and attacked by drunken college students. Lake Eola's current population of swans has not been immune to problems. Earlier this year, media reported on the disappearance of four baby swans at Lake Eola.

We understand that it has been determined Lake Eola can support 100 swans before they would become a nuisance. Does the city have a plan for what will happen when the swan population exceeds that number? Swans are prolific breeders. We again encourage you to look at Lakeland's experience, where each year the city rounds up baby swans and auctions them off to face an uncertain future.

Swans and other ornamental birds at public parks often suffer from an inadequate diet. Despite educational efforts to the contrary, it is common for swans to be fed food that is unhealthy. At Lake Eola, we have witnessed people feed swans everything from white bread to Cheetos. (The Parks Division encourages the feeding of the swans.) Swans may also suffer from exposure to fertilizers and other harmful chemicals that end up in their environment.

Finally, the plan to release swans onto Lake Eola will cruelly deny these birds their natural behaviors. To keep the newly-arrived swans from leaving the park, their wings will be clipped, a permanent amputation that prevents them from flying. Birds that were born to fly great distances instead will remain flightless.

We love Lake Eola's swan-shaped paddle boats, but we urge you to cancel plans to import additional live swans to Lake Eola. Thank you. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Nanci Alexander, President

cc: John Perrone, Division Manager, Parks Division  
Lisa Early, Director, Families, Parks & Recreation Department  
Mayor Buddy Dyer and the Orlando City Council