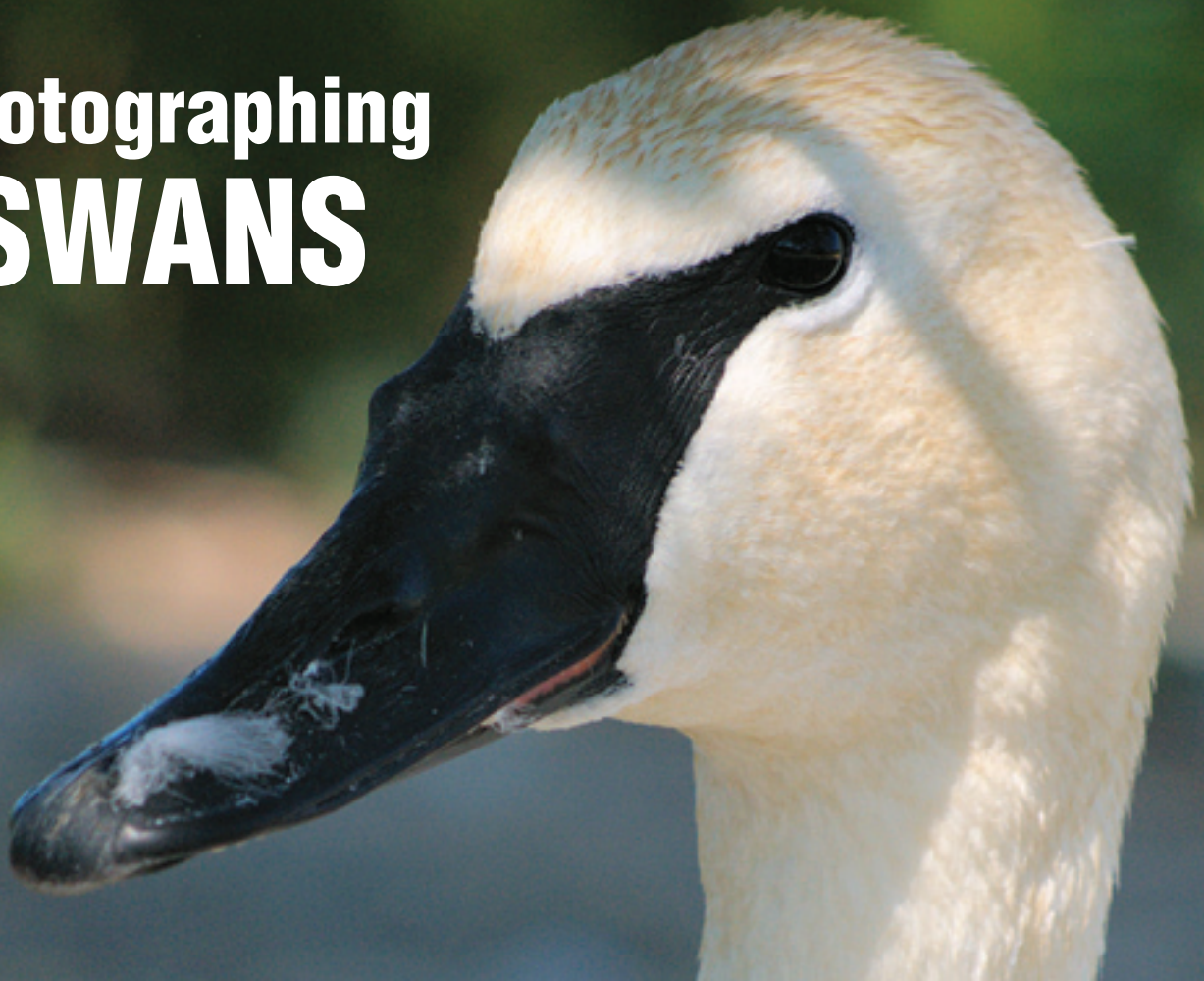
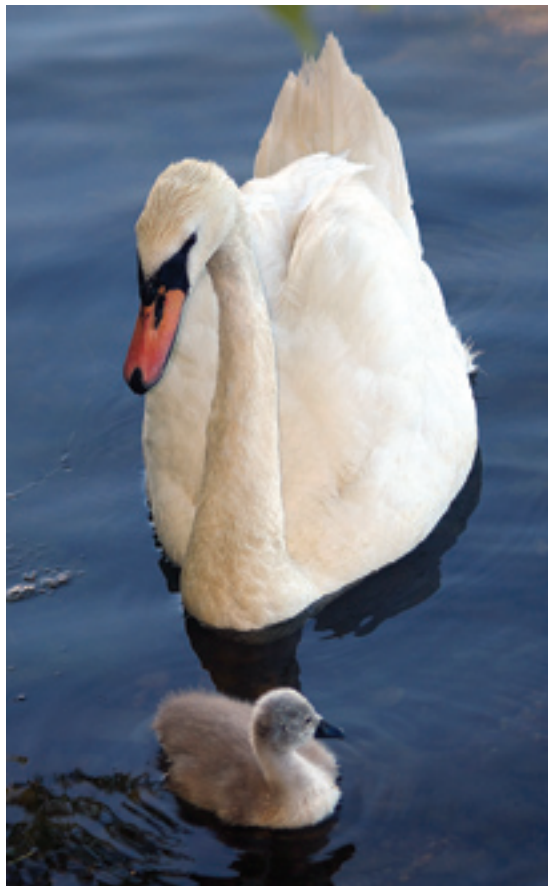


Photographing SWANS



Swan, close-up

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Swan and cygnet

Swans contribute, in a significant way, to human culture. Oftentimes, in the past, their role was practical—as food. Chaucer’s monk, at the end of the fourteenth century, noted that a ‘fat swan roast’ was his favorite meal. More often than not, swans have been viewed as romantic creatures—their pure white or black color, graceful elongated necks and sedate swimming make them appear supernatural. Celtic legend associated them with the spirits of dead princes and kings, or sometimes as mythical tricksters. There is a story of an Irish peasant who concealed his gold in the body of a dead swan, whereupon the swan came to life and flew away with his savings. These contrasts in swan legend have continued. The tranquil swan in Saint-Saens’ ballet contrasts with the squabbling swan groups in Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake* and the metamorphosed swan warriors of Wagner’s operas.

While swans are graceful on water, they are clumsy and awkward on land. Their cygnets, dull brown and ragged-looking, are the models for the ‘ugly duckling’ of Hans Anderson. Although swans are usually peaceful, anyone who has been attacked by them at a picnic knows they can also be very fierce! Though

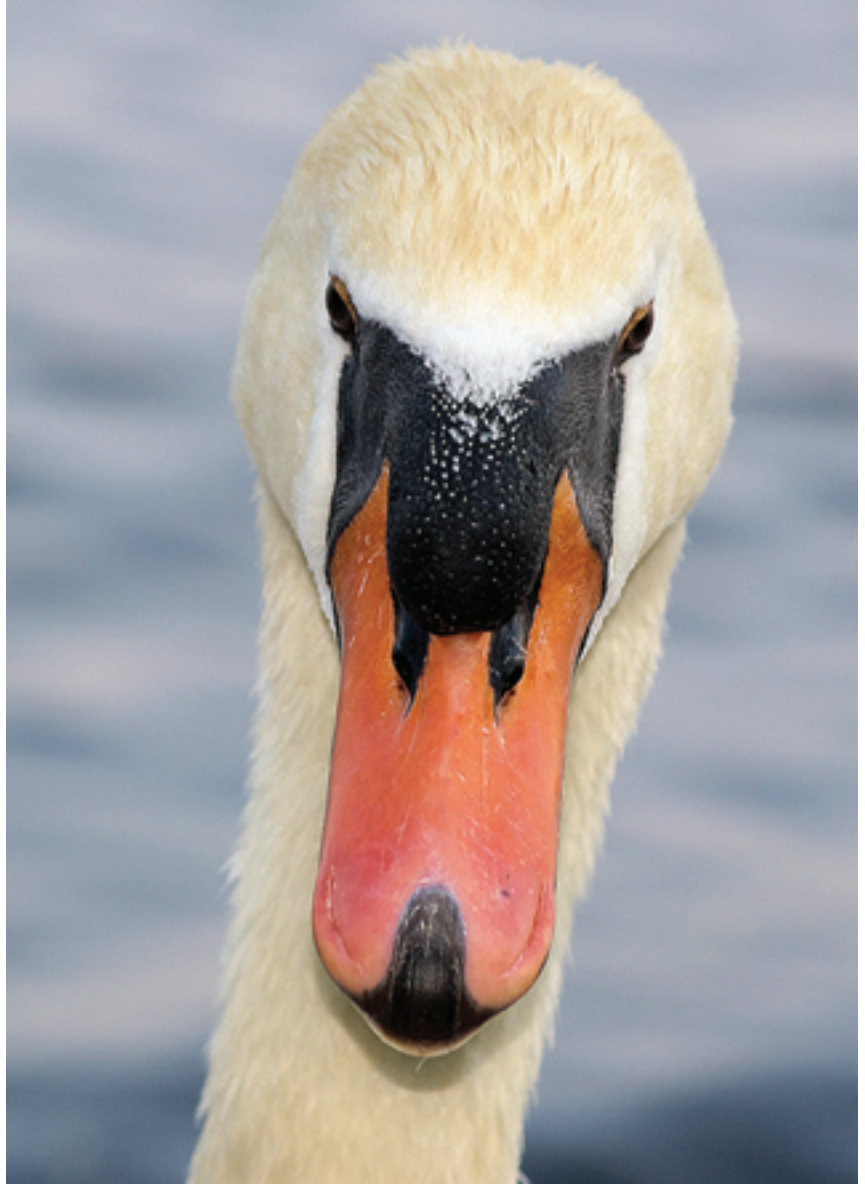
swans can make only a whistling sound, they are supposed to be able, in legend, to sing beautiful songs at the moment of their death—so swans are ‘sweet singers’ as in Shakespeare’s *Swan of Avon*.

How can the photographer capture the contrasts of mystery and reality in swan photography? Swans tend to congregate near people, and seem to enjoy sharing space with swimmers and recreational boaters. The edges of lakes and rivers are their normal haunts, and perhaps they are best shot in morning light, when they seem to be most tranquil. The images in this article were captured at the Desjardins Canals—a waterway in Dundas, Ontario, which was once a lively shipping channel, but now has long silted up. Some of the images show the swans in rather awkward poses that capture the ‘contrast’ in the swans’ persona. While others capture their graceful and dignified mannerisms.

Once you become familiar with the swan’s routines and behaviour you will be able to capture some stunning images of this majestic bird. Be patient, and wait for the moment when this bird shows its true graceful beauty.

The images were taken with a Pentax DL2, with the Pentax 50-200 mm lens and have not been modified with editing software, except that the RAW files have been converted to suit the *PSA Journal’s* requirements. ■

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Mute Swans have distinctive orange beaks with black tips



Cygnets testing the waters



Timothy Morton, APSA