

# Nonnative Species: Muscovy Ducks

## General information

Wild muscovy ducks (*Cairina moschata*) are native to Central America and South America, and have expanded their natural range to parts of Texas. In Florida, feral muscovy ducks can be found on urban and suburban lakes and on farms throughout the state. These birds have escaped captivity or were released illegally for ornamental purposes. Males can be identified by the fleshy red caruncles, or warty bumps, on the face over the eyes and at the base of the bill. Females generally have smaller caruncles or may lack them entirely. They feed on aquatic plants, grasses, seeds, insects and human handouts.

Muscovy ducks are prolific breeders and local populations can increase dramatically in a short time. As a result, controversies frequently arise between residents who enjoy the birds and those who consider them a nuisance due to their droppings, property damage, or aggressive behavior. Muscovy ducks can also compete with native waterfowl and spread disease in overcrowded conditions.

## What can be done to prevent problems with muscovy ducks?

- Never feed muscovy ducks, either by direct handout or by putting feed out in locations accessible to them. Natural food for muscovy ducks is plentiful and feeding the ducks can lead to overcrowding, messy conditions, and the potential to spread disease.
- Haze muscovy ducks on your property with a water hose or have a dog chase them away (but not catch them). Let the ducks know that your property is an unwelcome place.



Andrew Fanning/ FWC



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## Legal status

Muscovy ducks are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, but the US Fish and Wildlife Service has issued a Control Order (**USFWS 50 CFR 21.54**) allowing control of muscovy ducks and their nests and eggs in areas outside their natural range, including here in Florida. Federal regulations allow control of muscovy ducks by landowners, wildlife management agencies, and tenants, agents, or employees without federal or state permits. **Florida Statute 379.231** and federal regulations **50 CFR 21.25(b)(8)(i)** prohibit the release of muscovy ducks.



## Legal options to take muscovy ducks

Removal of nonnative species can benefit native species and reduce conflicts with people. Birds caught under the Control Order must be humanely euthanized or donated to scientific or educational institutions where they must be maintained under conditions that will prevent escape into the wild.

- Muscovy ducks can be removed using humane methods of live-capture, typically by using nets or cage traps. All traps must be checked at least once every 24 hours. Captured non-target species are required to be released on site.
- Muscovy ducks can be taken by use of a firearm on private property during daylight hours with landowner permission. Non-toxic shot or bullets must be used. Please check with the local sheriff's office or police department for firearm ordinances before discharging a firearm.
- All euthanized birds must be disposed of by burial or incineration (**USFWS 50 CFR 21.54**).

## If you have further questions or need more help, call your regional Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission office:

### Main Headquarters

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### Regional Offices

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1239 S.W. 10th Street  
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