

THE ROMANCE OF SWANS SOMETIMES GOES HAYWIRE

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The choosy attitude of some birds in captivity is always a problem to the superintendent of a park or zoo. The swan story in last Sunday's Journal brings the report of another romance gone astray. Word has been received of the love affairs of two maiden swans at Lake Merritt, Oakland, California.

For some time the dilemma^M of the two lovely maiden swans had worried the upstairs window watchers around the lake. The swans were too lonely and had no mates. The Park Superintendent ought to do something about it. Inquiring from experts, he was told that Oakland should buy a half dozen male swans, as lady swans are very particular and will not take up with just any weary Willies that happen along.

If it was to cost that much to satisfy a couple of spinsters, sniffed the Superintendent, they could jump in the lake. But then came forward one of the sad window watchers and finally imported ^w to Romeo swans from New Hampshire and presented them to the Park. Nothing happened. With a snooty air, the two maiden swans swam together about the lake all summer, while their suitors had nothing to do but moon around and brood about the choosiness of women.

The fact is, that the behavior of swans must not be interpreted in human terms. In the first place, there are different varieties of swans as there are races of people. The two native swans in this country are the Whistling and the Trumpeter Swans. Upon occasion, both have been taken out of their wide, wild range and perhaps pinioned to keep in parks. But for the most part, our park swans are exotic foreigners. You might take two

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Italian queens and set them up with two German princes in their native land, and have a playground filled with little half-breeds. In a beautiful park you might release some queenly Trumpeter swans with a group of kingly Whistlers. But that is no reason why you should expect them to produce a flock of royal cygnets.

Another fact to be conjured with is, that certain species mate for life, a habit that park superintendents might not think of. A lady swan disappointed in her third year of her career and interfered with, might have her mind permanently set against any masculine gigolo. The sexual habits of birds are often strongly established during the first two years of life and are not readily changed. Also, companionship is a very strong factor. If two of the same sex are together for a period, association makes them dependent upon each other. They become real mates and are in no need of other companions, even sexually.

In the case of the Oakland swans, the species should be established first, and then the sex. Since the male and female are identical in dress and appearance, who is the expert who passed upon the sex of the Juliets and the two imported Romeos? One of the maidens might be a stately old unproductive Romeo, or one of the new Romeos might prove to be a lovely barren Juliet. There is always a reason for a romance that goes haywire.