

## ***Editor's Introduction***

# Exotic species and monkey paws

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**SOCIETY IS DIVIDED** over the question of how exotic species should be managed. As an example, consider the attitude of U.S. citizens toward 1 exotic species, mute swans (*Cygnus lotor*), which were imported from Europe. These birds have much going for them. Their bright, white plumage, their eagerness to swim our way for bread, and their prominence in legends has allowed them to conquer our hearts (Conover and McIvor 1993). Yet, many ecologists, wildlife biologists, and avid birders argue that we should spend time and money to eradicate mute swans from the U.S. because they are an exotic species, while concomitantly spending time and money to protect native birds from eradication. Such a seeming contradiction results from our ambivalent attitude towards exotic species.

One reason for society's ambivalence lies in the accepted definitions that distinguish exotic species from native species. Exotic species commonly are defined as those that reach a new landmass since the arrival of Europeans, while native species are defined as those that were already present when Europeans arrived or that arrived afterwards entirely by their own efforts. For example, if Europeans brought feral hogs to Hawaii, then they are an exotic species, but if Polynesians brought feral hogs to Hawaii before Captain Cook's discovery of the Hawaiian Islands, then they are not an exotic species.

Yet, before we get into philosophical arguments stemming from the definitions of native and exotics species, we might remember W. W. Jacobs' short story, "The Monkey's Paw" (Jacobs 1901). In it, the reader learns that some things are just too good to be true. It is a story about a monkey's paw that grants the wishes of its owner but in unexpected and tragic ways. For instance, the story's hero, who is given the



Michael R. Conover (Photo by Davis Archibald)

monkey's paw for safekeeping, wishes for a large sum of money, only to learn later that his son has been killed and that he will get proceeds from his son's life insurance policy. We need to remember that exotic species may look beautiful and benign when they first arrive on our shores but can morph into something sinister.

Certainly many human–wildlife conflicts that occur worldwide involve exotic species. One reason for exotic species causing so many conflicts is that their densities can reach alarmingly high levels in the areas they invade. This happens because the factors that limited their population in their native land (e.g., diseases, parasites, predators, and competitors) may be absent in newly-invaded areas (Roy et al. 2009). Several articles in this issue of *Human–Wildlife Conflicts* deal with exotic species, including brushtail possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) in New Zealand (Ji 2009), house cats in Australia (Dickman 2009), feral hogs (*Sus scrofa*; Friebel and Jodice 2009), and nine-banded armadillos (*Dasypus novemcinctus*; Gammons et al. 2009) in the U.S. The problems caused by exotic species will only worsen as

long as society is paralyzed by its ambivalent attitudes toward them. Society's ambivalence will continue until we, as wildlife managers, can articulate rational and persuasive reasons for our management philosophy. It is our burden to ensure that today's exotic species do not become tomorrow's monkey paws.

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