



Fourth Crossing Wildlife factsheet



Black Swan

Cygnus atratus

other names
none known



<https://mol.org/species/>

Description

Male: Approximately 1300mm in length. Mostly black, with white outer flight feathers. Eye changes from white to red in the breeding season. Beak varies from orange to dark red with a white bar in front of an off-white tip. Feet are dark grey.

Female: Approximately 1200mm in length. Colours as per male. Eye colour is usually lighter. Slightly shorter neck in proportion to body.

Juvenile: At fledgling, plumage is mottled grey and brown. White wing feathers all black-tipped. Eye is red-brown. Beak dull red with traces of grey. First complete moult is in the first year when it takes on the adult appearance.

Voice: Trumpet like and quite musical. Mostly calls in flight or for contact. Males have a deeper longer call than females.

The Black Swan can be found predominantly in the south-east and south-west of mainland Australia. It is absent from parts of the top end of Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia and from the dry interior. The swan has also been introduced to New Zealand. Main habitat for the swan includes freshwater and briny swamps, rivers, lakes and estuaries. Diet consists mainly of freshwater weed and with their long necks they can reach down to depths of around one metre to pluck water plants from the bottom. They also graze on grasses close to waters edge.

Breeding season is mainly from April to September in the south and around February to May in the north, however the swan can breed anytime when the climate is favourable. Like most swans, the Black Swan appears to mate for life. At the beginning of the season a pair performs a mating ritual where they face one another and with wings raised, necks extended and beaks raised, they call repeatedly. The pair bond is reinforced and the tempo increases, terminating sometimes with two or three rapid wing-beats by the male. This ritual can sometimes last up to 30 minutes before copulation. Dominant pairs are quite territorial and obtain the most favourable sites within the colony. Nests are built within colonies in huge stick and reed mounds in shallow water, on an island or on floating platforms in deep water. Nests are often destroyed as the swans pilfer nesting material from each others nests. Four to six eggs are usually laid - eggs that are misplaced from nest damage are usually swept up by other neighbouring swans and incubated in their nests. Incubation is approximately 35 to 45 days. When the cygnets hatch the parents frequently graze at a distance but continue to defend the nest. Cygnets leave the nest at approximately 120 to 160 days.



Black Swan cygnet



Black Swan on nest