



Issue 3

NEWSLETTER

January 2016

WELCOME

As the year turns and we head towards Spring and the new breeding season, we are celebrating our first six months with a brand new logo. Much appreciation to the organisational skills of Brian, who has arranged and financed the new 'face' of Swan Support.

In this edition you will find articles on:

- Christmas Day
- Work Experience; an interview
- Releasing
- Rescuer's Report
 - Down on the Trout Farm
 - Agnetha's story
- Current Residents
- And Finally

Enjoy!
The Editor

CHRISTMAS DAY

It may be Christmas Day for us, but for the swans it is simply another day in their lives - a day of seeking out food, preening and keeping healthy, or if one of a pair, strengthening the bond between each other and guarding a territory in preparation for nesting.

It is vital that Swan Support is ready in case of any swan emergency so the charity is manned 24 hours, 366 days of the year; there is always someone at the end of the phone, ready to respond to any call out.

Fortunately this year there was only one call - early in the morning. A cygnet had crash-landed and broken its wing. Wendy picked it up, treated it and thereafter, the phones remained quiet. No further calls, no rescues required, but that still meant plenty of work to be done. One of the jobs on the list was to carry the cygnets that had been indoors overnight out into the grassy pen. Easy to catch them when enclosed in a small space!

Whilst they were busy grazing and preening, the pens were thoroughly cleaned out, shredded paper put down and feeding bowls filled. As it was a very wet day, they did not stay out all day long, needing to stay warm and dry. Catching them was an adventure in itself; the larger the space, the more corners to hide in. It must have taken well over half an hour to catch them all and gather them back in the pens. They can move fast when they want to.

With the cygnets safely back inside and all other swans fed and checked, it was time for a cup of tea.

WORK EXPERIENCE

One of the community services offered by the Charity is to provide work experience for young people, looking to develop their skills and build confidence in the working environment. Gemma, from Slough, came to us recently for a week's work and the Editor managed to catch up with her as she was completing her fourth day.

How did you find out about Swan Support?

I originally asked for a placement in an organisation that worked with animals, and the school told me about Swan Support. I was initially surprised because I didn't realise that swans needed rescuing, and thought something like the RSPCA would take care of them. I didn't realise there was a charity focussed on this, but being curious, I decided to give it a go. It has definitely been an unusual placement.

What have you most enjoyed in your time here?

Meeting new people, being independent and learning about the swans.

What did you discover about swans?

I have actually formed a different opinion of swans having spent a week with them. I used to think they were rather vicious, but having fed them and got close to them, they are much nicer than I realised.

What have you been doing?

I've cleaned out pens, put paper down and cleaned the floors. Washed the dirty bowls and refilled all the

feeding troughs. On my second day I learned how to hold a cygnet.



What was that like?

I was nervous at first, and someone else had to pick it up and put it in my arms, but then I was ok. I was surprised at how heavy it was and how soft its feathering. I also didn't know that swans had claws.

Tomorrow I am going with Wendy to release some swans and I am really looking forward to that. After all, that's what the ultimate aim is.

RELEASES

As Gemma said in her interview, releasing is one of the most rewarding aspects of this work. Our aim is to take in injured swans, assist them in their recovery and then release them back into the wild.

Once the final health check has been performed, a rescuer is on hand to wrap the swan up and transport it back to its original territory. It's vital to place the swan in its familiar area; whether lake or river. And of course to ensure that it either is released into a flock, or in the case of a mating pair, back to its mate.

If one of a pair, we first ensure that the mate is still around and that there is no interloper who has flown in

and taken the place of the injured one. Assuming all is well, we release the swan into the water near its mate. As they swim together it is moving to watch the reunion; often accompanied by soft calling to each other and head tosses, with feathers fluffed up.



In the case of a swan going back into a flock, the swan usually makes a quick dash for the open water, followed by a good dunking in the water, a quick wash, a shake of the wings and all is well in the world.



Since January 1st we have released 27 swans back into their natural habitat.

RESCUE - DOWN ON THE TROUT FARM

On one of the days between Christmas and New Year, we got a call from a lady walking her dog that there was a swan trapped on some water between Iver and Cowley.

The first trip was not very successful. The water was in a locked area next to the track. Next day the couple phoned again to say the swan was still there, so Bob Jo and Wendy went there to try once more. It turned

out that the “water” was a disused trout farm, where a stream had been diverted into about six parallel channels, each about fifty feet long, with a channel going across the top and the bottom, forming an outer square. The channels had concrete walls, about 4 feet high. Two old walkways, made of (now rotten) planks, went across the top. A very high hedgerow running along by the pathway meant that it was lucky we spotted the swan at all. The chief suspect for the swan being there was the electricity pylons that crossed the Iver-Cowley road at this point.

The next problem was how to get in. The ground was used as an overflow car store, and had some very expensive cars in there. Calls to the company were not being answered. Fortunately, the lady who had reported the swan came by. There was a semi-permanent mobile home nearby, and when they talked to the owner, he had a key on behalf of the garage, “just in case”. He was happy to let us in.

The swan was less happy, but found it quite easy to keep away by moving to the opposite end of the channel to where we were. No way were we going to get to it without a cunning plan. This plan was for Bob to go into the channels and shoo it the other way, where it could be caught. Fortunately there were waders in the van. So it was into the waders, over the 4 foot top channel wall, and down one of the parallel channels, out of sight of the swan.

The first problem was staying upright, as much of the water had been silted over, with lots of thick, high reeds. The good news was that the base of the

channels was concrete, so where there were no reeds it was relatively easy going as the water was only about 2 feet deep. After about five minutes Bob had gone down to the bottom end of a channel next but one to where the swan was. It was surprised to see him! As Bob slowly waded towards him, he slowly retreated, quite sure that Bob and his hook were no threat to him. Bob moved a few feet, swan retreated a few feet, till it got to the top channel, where it now saw Wendy and her hook, standing on some earth by the top channel. He thought about making a break for it past Bob, changed his mind, and direction once the hook got too close, and went straight on to Wendy's. He was hauled out and examined; a by now absolutely knackered Bob had to crawl his own way through the reeds and over the concrete wall to get back on dry land.

As it turned out, the pylons had broken the swan's left wing, so it had absolutely no future where it was.

The man with the key said "I never knew you guys would go to all that trouble to get it". We took that as a compliment. Bob Lang, Rescuer

AGNETHA'S STORY

Hello my name is Agnetha. I am a Swedish blue duck - with attitude! My name derives from one of the singers in the Swedish group Abba (although I personally think I am better looking). Hee hee!! I live happily on the Grand Union Canal with my boyfriend Andy and my other duck pals.

I have been described as fun to be with, quite a character, a little vain (love having my picture

taken) - when I am in the mood! - I've even thought of investing in one of those new selfie sticks!!!



I want to share with you one of my recent adventures involving **SWAN SUPPORT**.

It was just before Christmas. I had an unfortunate encounter resulting in my right wing being broken. I was unable to swim confidently and was struggling quite a bit. Being strong and stubborn (as most women), I was content with carrying on as normal.

One day however one of these interfering humans decided I would be better off having my wing seen to. (I know she meant well.) There I was minding my own business, chilling out in the water with Andy and planning that night's dinner, when all of a sudden a net appeared. It was on a pole. At the end of the pole was a human.

It became apparent very quickly that the human was trying to catch me. Andy and my pals flew off (I don't fly) and I suddenly became a "sitting duck" - pardon the pun! My first instinct was survival. I thought "sod you lot" I'm not giving up without a fight!

3 hours later (hee hee) they were still trying to catch me! I certainly gave them a run for their money - even with an injured wing (silly humans). Needless to say I won and they soon gave up and disappeared. The humans came back the next day but it was a similar story with me winning and them eventually giving up.

Things got back to normal very quickly until the 3rd day when they turned up again, this time with a boat! Yet again Andy and my "so called friends" all disappeared. (Where are your friends when you need them heh?)

Once again I was alone on the canal with a few coots and moorhens for company. I went in and out of the reeds, ducking and diving into the water whilst the human in the boat pursued me. I was laughing all the way up the canal, down the canal and all the way up again. What a hoot! Neither the person on the boat nor the human with a net on the bank could catch me (silly silly humans).

I even surprised myself with some of my epic moves. I knew the humans didn't want to hurt me but decided to make it difficult for them and have a bit of fun at the same time - I told you I was fun to be with!! It was all one big game to me and I loved wearing these humans out! At one point I dived into a coot's nest looking for moral support but I was wasting my time. Coot wasn't interested. CHARMING!

After several hours I was quite worn out so hid behind some reeds at the other side of the canal. ALAS! The next thing I know I was positioned inside the SWAN SUPPORT boat with some human's arms around my body. I thought - "blimey it took you long enough!"



I have now been in SWAN SUPPORT for a month whilst recuperating. I have seen a vet twice who has now fixed my wing. I have to say I had a fab Christmas with plenty of food and wine (joking about the wine). I mingled with the swans who were very accommodating doing whatever I wanted - they had no choice as I am quite bossy! They may think they are regal (the swans) but I am an equal match for them!

I had a good break from Andy for a while - I am a firm believer in couples taking separate holidays from time to time. It keeps the romance alive!

I am due to go home tomorrow and have to say I am looking forward to re-uniting with Andy and the other birds. I am sure they have missed me and I have heard on the grapevine that things have been a little dull without me around.



I would like to say a big THANK YOU to Wendy and her team at SWAN SUPPORT. They have not only fixed my wing but also given me a wonderful Christmas break. This was my 2nd visit in 6 months. - Well I can't help it if I keep getting into fixes can I??

Bye for now.

Lots of love Agnetha xxx

CURRENT RESIDENTS

As we are a rehabilitation centre rather than a sanctuary, the number of residents ebbs and flows, depending on the number of rescues we are called to, as well as the speed of recovery. It is amazing how resilient swans are, and how they can make a full recovery from life-threatening injuries.

Here are the latest figures. Since the first of the year we have completed 67 rescues. Some days are filled with rescues, almost from dawn to dusk, other days the phones stay silent. And as always we rely on the observant nature of the public to let us know of any injured or distressed swan. We would far rather come out to check on a swan, than not and have it suffer. At this time of year, many swans can be seen in fields grazing on the crops, and we sometimes get calls enquiring if that is normal behaviour. We go out and check - make sure the swan has access to water, can fly off easily and then we leave well alone.

At time of publication we have 27 swans in residence, plus a pair of Black Swans; yesterday they were joined by a two day old Egyptian gosling which had been swept away in the strong currents.

AND FINALLY

We continue to rely solely on the generosity of the General Public. All donations, however small, are greatly appreciated and go to ensure that our mute swans can continue to grace our rivers and lakes and bring pleasure to thousands of people. You can make a difference today by texting a donation to 70070 of between £1-10 using the code:

FC0040 £(amount).

Or by sending in a cheque.

Thank you in advance.

The Editor

Wendy Hermon
Operations Director and Founder
Swan Support
Queen Mother Reservoir
Horton Road
Datchet
SL3 9HN

Follow us on twitter: @swan_support
Like us on Facebook: Swan Support
Website: www.swansupport.org.uk
Email: info@swansupport.org.uk

For any swan rescue call:
07968 868172
