



Issue 4

NEWSLETTER

May 2016

WELCOME

As we go to press, activity on the Thames and lakes is increasing. Cygnets have been born, territories are being fiercely defended, and there is an abundance of new life. We have decided that for this issue of the newsletter, we will devote our pages to a gallery celebrating our swans. You will find articles and pictures on:

- The First Cygnets of the Year
- Preening
- Friend or Foe
- By the Way
- Current Residents
- And Finally

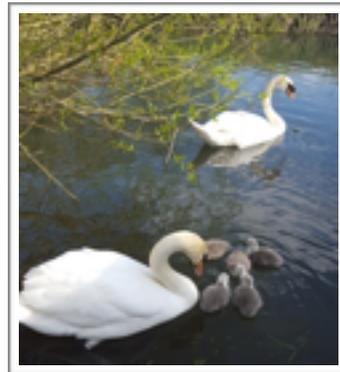
Enjoy!
The Editor

THE FIRST CYGNETS

For those of us who love swans this is a particularly exciting time of the year as the first cygnets are born.

It has become somewhat of a competition in this area to see which of two pairs of swans are the first to produce their next brood. One pair live on a lake near Theale, the other pair have lived on the Holybrook River

for many years. Each pair has been extremely successful in hatching anywhere between 6 - 9 cygnets. This year it was the turn of the Holybrook pair to be first to hatch. 5 cygnets showed up at the home of one of our stalwart supporters, Alex on the 28th April, with proud mum and dad standing guard.



It didn't take long for the cygnets to learn how to clamber up the bank and nestle in the long grass for a rest. Cared for by Alex, they are thriving and give much pleasure to all who walk & live along the river.



PREENING

I remember the first time I saw a swan preening itself. I actually thought it was having a fit and was wondering quite what to do. Fortunately my blushes were saved by Wendy explaining to me all about this important part of a swan's behaviour - one that is an indicator of its health and wellbeing.

In order for a swan to remain waterproof and in tiptop condition, it will take time every day to 'wash' itself. This comprises of several manoeuvres:

Photo 1: Ducking itself in the water, rolling around and ensuring that the water washes over its entire body

Photo 2: Gathering a secretion from a gland on its back, near the tail, which provides the necessary waterproofing. The swan then transfers that secretion by rubbing its head along its body.

Photo 3: Preening individual feathers to ensure they are in pristine condition.

Photo 4: Flapping wings robustly in the water to dislodge any loose feathers and complete the preening.

These shots were taken recently at Swan Support, indicating that this swan was well on the way to recovery from its injuries and was readying itself for release.



Photo 1



Photo 2

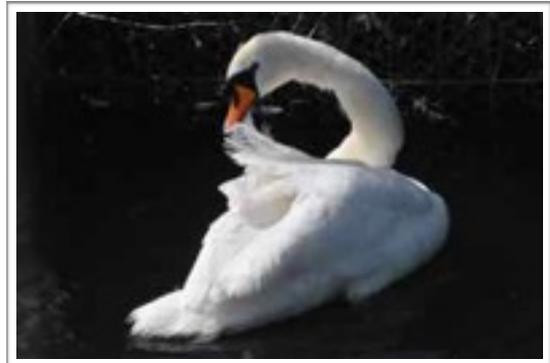


Photo 3

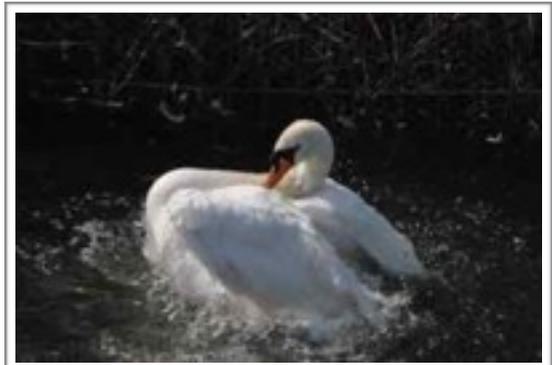


Photo 4

FRIEND OR FOE

We are often asked if swans recognise individuals and based on our experience, the answer is an unequivocal yes. None of us are quite sure how they are able to tell one person from another, but tell they can.

The Cob at Arlington is a prime example. He has had to be caught several times during his lifetime and as a result has come to know the regular rescuers well. I only have to start walking towards the lake for him to notice me and begin his aggressive moves to protect his family. It doesn't matter what I am wearing, whether I am silent or not, he still recognises me. It doesn't matter where he is on the lake, as soon as he spots me, his wings go up, he starts puffing out his chest, and he takes off towards me. It is quite a spectacular sight.



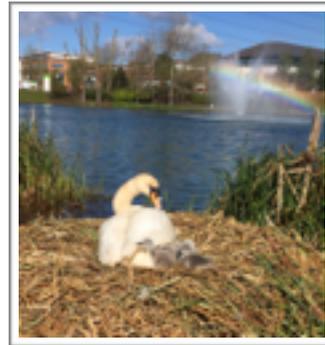
At this point I usually back off to a safe distance and simply admire the power of this extra-ordinary bird.

If I actually have to catch him, that is a whole other story. Fortunately he has kept himself out of trouble these past few months, so I have not had to run the gauntlet of his power.

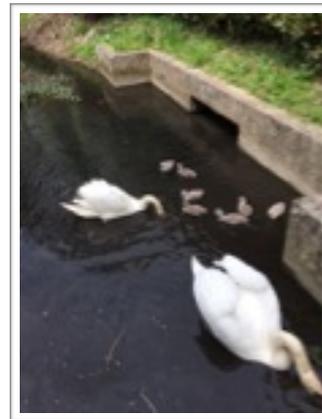
BY THE WAY

This pair at Arlington also hatched a brood, just one day after the Holybrook pair. Numbering 7, they are

healthy and have been giving the local business folk plenty to talk about. This particular family has a habit of going walkabout as there are several offshoots and culverts from the lake. The birds have a habit of disappearing, up one of them and sometimes it is a few days before they return to the lake, by which time we have walked miles looking for them.



Note the culvert in the picture below - it actually leads under the M4 motorway and on to the fields beyond.



CURRENT RESIDENTS

At this time of year, we await the first cygnet arrivals. Whilst we would much prefer they stay with their families, the truth is that cygnets do require rescuing - for a variety of reasons.

Some are simply abandoned by their parents as they are late hatching and the family has already moved on to the river. Sometimes the cygnets get caught in the

flow of the river and are cast over weirs. And sometimes they get injured - when they are first born they are prone to attacks from Magpies, Heron and Pike. At present there are two cygnets who have taken up residence in our facility.



The cygnet in the top photograph had been abandoned in its nest as its siblings had hatched two days earlier and the family swam off leaving this one on its own. In the second photograph the cygnet on the right had been

attacked by a magpie and had an injury to its head. Both are now recovering well. Unfortunately none of them can be returned to their families and so they will stay with us at Swan Support until late autumn, when they will be fully grown and strong enough to be released into a flock near to their birthplace.

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

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