



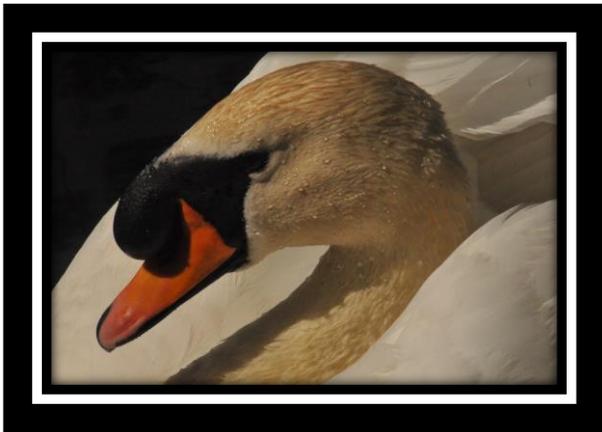
Issue 9

NEWSLETTER

February 2018

WELCOME

Apologies for the delay in producing this newsletter – the first of a new year.



It has been a challenging start. Swans have graced our rivers and lakes for years. Serenely moving across the water, they provide joy to countless people and families. Watching a mother carry her cygnets upon her back is to see absolute dedication. Seeing two swans dance their love for each other is to recognize the beauty of these birds. Who as a child has not been taken to feed the swans (and ducks)?

The swans are a barometer of the health of our waters, and dare I say, the health of our human spirit. We need to cherish them, ensure they thrive and as you will read in this issue, they seem to be facing more and more dangers.

Learning about them, educating each other, and taking care of them will ensure that they continue to provide us with enjoyment and remind us we are part of a living system.

This issue is focused on the dangers they are facing:

- Bird Flu
 - What is bird flu?
 - Symptoms
 - The Current Situation
 - Human Impact
- Advisory
- Rescue Update
 - Crash Lands
 - Shootings
 - An amusing tale (we need one at least!)
- An appeal
- And finally

This newsletter may make uncomfortable reading for some of you. And we feel it is important to share the whole story of what is happening with our swans.

The Editor

BIRD FLU

What is bird flu?

Bird flu is literally what it says – an influenza that has targeted a specific host – in this case birds.

There are different strains of bird flu but they all can have a devastating effect on birds, both wild and domesticated.

It is spread through contact between those birds that are infected and healthy birds

Symptoms

It is fairly easy to spot the symptoms in swans:

- A distinct kink at the bottom of the neck
- Lethargy which results in a flattened body
- Gaping (having trouble breathing)

The Current Situation

Bird flu has been confirmed in the Windsor flock and over 50 birds have died. So far it has not spread upstream and the flock at Reading is being checked on a daily basis.

It seems that the outbreak is being contained by due diligence from all those involved. There have been no further deaths in the past couple of days.

Human Impact

There is a very low risk to humans.

However, as our rescuers are exposed to it, we are taking appropriate preventative action to minimize the risk to ourselves – and we continue to remove infected and dead birds.

As you can imagine it is a sobering job to spend your days searching for dead birds and our thanks go to the team doing this work.

Thanks go to Jo for continuing to care for the birds at the centre during this time.

All other rescuers have been banned from attending the centre. We are focused on rescuing birds that are injured in other ways, but will not pick up any dead birds. If a bird needs treatment we use other resources to care for them.

Advisory

Due to the outbreak of avian influenza in the Windsor area, the public have been advised by DEFRA and Public Health England not to feed the birds.

This is, of course, having a huge effect on the welfare of the wildlife, and Swan Support are feeding them daily.

If you are able to help us with the cost of providing food for the birds, please click on the donation link below. Thank you all for your messages and for your ongoing support.

<https://swansupport.charitycheckout.co.uk>

We have already had a great response and our thanks go to:

The Queens Swan Marker
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Alma Veterinary Hospital, Windsor
The Swan Sanctuary at Shepperton
Waterman's Arms, Eton

RESCUE UPDATE

Crash Lands

At this time of year, young birds are beginning to fly the nest and find their way to a flock to complete their growing process. As you can imagine they are not yet skilled flyers and in high winds can easily crash land. Sometimes in the strangest of places. Adults are also flying, looking for mates or a territory to call their own.

Many of our calls have involved rescuing birds that have landed in back gardens (I still have not figured out quite how they land in some of the smallest places I have ever seen), behind fences, or on roads. One somehow managed to land on the roundabout under the overpass by The Oracle Centre in Reading and I got there in time to catch it before it walked into the busy traffic. I had the help of a passerby who had called it in and then stayed with it until I arrived.

Here are three different crash land images:

The Oracle Reading
Crash land on the road



Sutton Courtney
Unwelcome arrival in a
Breeding pair's territory



Reading

Trapped behind railway fencing



Dog Attacks

We continue to respond to swans attacked by dogs. At this time of year the birds are often out of the water feeding on grass to bulk up their weight before the breeding season. They are then more vulnerable to attacks by dogs and as we have said before, a dog bite is often fatal due to infection.

Please, please, please keep dogs under control.

Shootings

Once again, a number of swans have been shot in the Slough area. We have begun a petition to have the law changed on air rifles and we ask for your support. You can sign it at:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/211633>

An Amusing Tale

Sometimes I surprise myself with my lack of thought when approaching a rescue. It is as if I leave my brain in the car!

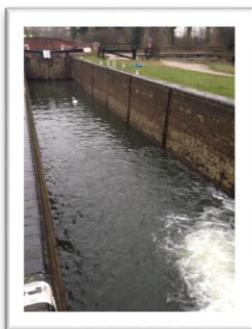
The rescue took place at Fobney Lock – a swan trapped in the lock which was very low in water. Given it is winter and no boats were likely to move through the lock, it required catching by yours truly.

As I arrived in the pouring rain I noticed a flurry of feathers on the towpath, some with blood on them. In the lock the swan looked healthy enough – simply caught in a confined space.

The water was very low – over 12 feet below the edge. What to do?

At this point, common sense clearly took flight from my brain. I went up to one end of the lock to check how far my pole would reach. Not quite, but still I thought I would try. I fed the swan in but it remained wary and out of reach.

A couple of runners came by and I enlisted their help. My plan was to lie on the ground, lean over the edge with my pole while they held my legs, and then I would feed in the swan and catch it with my hook. We tried it and failed – the swan still out of reach and me feeling very precarious hanging over the edge, looking into a long drop into very cold muddy water.



At this point one of the helpers turned to me and said 'Why don't we fill up the lock with water?' I wish I could have seen my own face – it must have been a picture. Of course. The simplest and most obvious solution.

We duly filled the lock with water, caught the swan and I checked it out in the back of my car.

Unfortunately I discovered a large dog bite on his back which had exposed muscle and spine.

As I was unable to go to Windsor, I took it to Castle Vets who kindly examined the bird. Together we decided that it required putting to sleep. Due to bird flu the vets were unable to bring the bird into the surgery, so the examination and treatment took place in the rain, in the carpark, in the back of my car. Another unnecessary death.

Thanks to Castle Vets for their support in challenging conditions.

And next time I will remember to take my brain with me and think things through.

AND FINALLY

As you can imagine with this current situation we need all the help we can get. Your donations are vitally important. Please support the welfare of our swans and our work by texting a donation to 70070 of between £1-10 using the code: FC0040 £(amount). Or by sending in a cheque to the address below.

Thank you in advance.

The Editor

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