



# BLACK SWAN

**Anseriformes**  
**Family: Anatidae**  
**Genus: *Cygnus***  
**Species: *atratus***



**Range:** Found throughout Australia and introduced to New Zealand and Sweden  
**Habitat:** Lakes & ponds that can be fresh, brackish or salt.  
**Niche:** Diurnal, aquatic, herbivore  
**Wild diet:** Salt tolerant water plants  
**Zoo diet:** grains and chopped greens  
**Life Span:** (Wild) up to 40 years  
(Captivity)  
**Sexual dimorphism:** Male “cob” is slightly larger than the female “pen”  
**Location in SF Zoo:** New exhibit at Pachyderm Bldg.

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## APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

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They are large black birds with a long neck and red bill with a white tip. The tips of the flight feathers are also white whereas the juveniles are black. Their webbed feet are also black. With their long neck they do not have to dive for food. Cygnets are able to fly 2 – months after hatching. Parents have a staggered molt with the female going first at the start of laying the clutch. As she regains her flight abilities the male will begin his molt and then regain his flight at the same time as the cygnets.

<b>Weight:</b>	up to 20 lbs
<b>Length:</b>	44 – 55” inches
<b>Wing span:</b>	6 ft

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## STATUS & CONSERVATION

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Is now a game bird on the South Island of New Zealand with an estimated population of 70,000. (As of 1994). 50,000 birds have been recorded at a single site in Australia

## BLACK SWAN

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### COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

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The male's trumpet call is deeper than the female's when in flight. Birds produce a cooing when on the ground.

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### COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

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Young (cygnets) have fluffy grey plumage and dark beaks that become mottled-brown after 3 – 4 weeks. Juveniles tend to change partners but once mature they mate for life. Both parents perform incubation duties. Nests are constructed from twigs & reeds in the center of a lake and will rebuild it year after year. These nests can reach 5' across. Nesting takes place from February to September. Young remain with their parents for 9-months. Young feed themselves as soon as they can swim on various insects.

Incubation:	35 -40 days	Sexual Maturity:	18 months
# of Eggs:	3 - 9	Fledging.	

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### MISCELLANEOUS

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The swan was introduced to New Zealand in 1864 to control the introduced watercress. They were "discovered" in 1697 by Dutch explorers though these birds are found in aboriginal myths. The only 2 species of Black Swans are found in the southern hemisphere.

Cygnus comes from the Gk *kyknos* = swan & *atratus* = dressed in black.

#### Sources:

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Wild New Zealand © 1994 p. 39 by Les Molloy & Gerald Cubitt  
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Created 3/2006