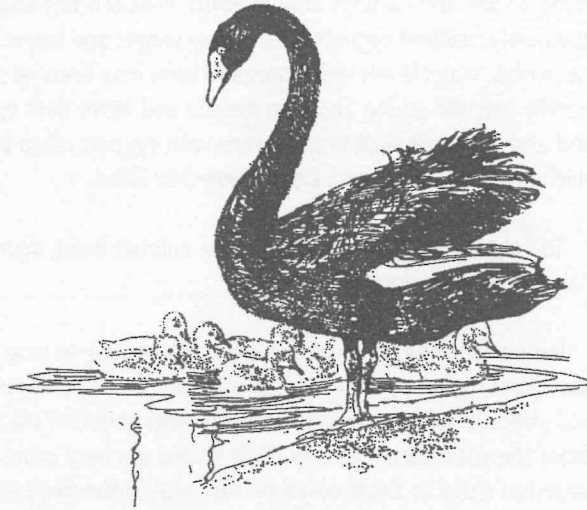


# BLACK SWAN

(*Cygnus atratus*)



**Description:** The black swan is unique in being the only swan that is black. All other swans are white or have predominantly white adult plumage. Adult black swans have a sooty appearance, apart from their white wing quills and sometimes the feathers of the upper parts are tinged brown and edged grey. The wing feathers have a peculiar crinkled edge. The red bill has a white bar across the tip, the eyes are white or red, and the legs are blackish. Young birds are mostly dull greyish-brown with black wing feathers, tipped with white. They have a brown eye and a grey to pinkish-red bill, which is barred greyish white towards the tip.

**Habit:** Black swans prefer extensive open waters, either fresh or salt, including estuaries and sheltered coastal areas. They need at least 20 m to take off. Their food consists of mainly aquatic plants, which are taken up from the bottom using their long neck. They also occasionally feed on surface plants and graze on grass verges and lawns. Swans mate for life and live in family parties until the following breeding season. The breeding season varies between March and January, depending on the location and season. Both parents build the nest and incubate the 2-9 eggs, which are pale green when first laid and become paler with age. The nest is a bulky structure of sticks and rushes, placed on an island in a swamp, amongst trees or bushes or in open water. The eggs take 35-45 days to hatch. It takes a further 75-95 days for the downy, pale grey cygnets to become fully feathered.

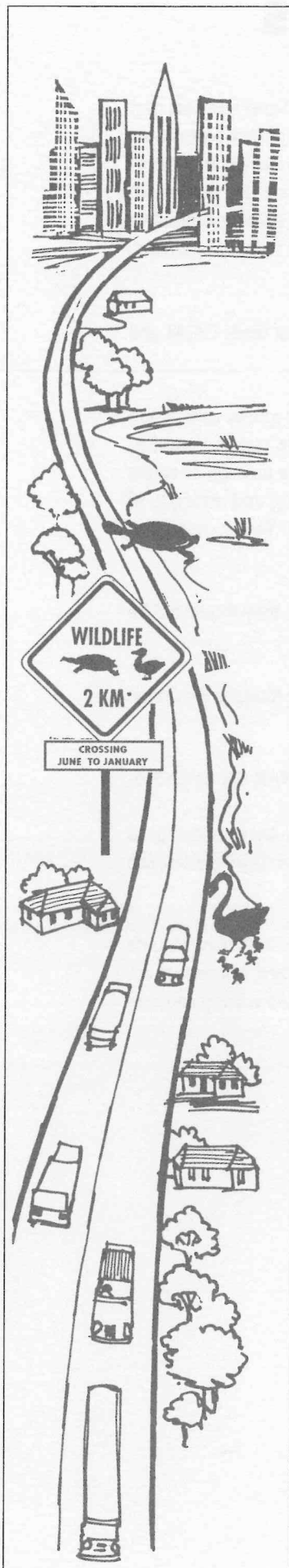
**Status and distribution:** The black swan is Western Australia's bird emblem. It is common throughout Australia and in Western Australia ranges as far north as the southern Kimberley. Aggregations of up to 8,000 have been recorded in areas such as the Peel-Harvey estuary, between late spring and autumn. Perth's Swan River was discovered by the Dutch explorer William de Vlamingh in January 1697 and named after its resident black swans.



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# WILDLIFE CROSSING ROADS

The black swan is quite abundant in the south-west of Western Australia. Small numbers nest on most lakes and swamps around Perth. Between July and December, nesting black swans walk their newly hatched cygnets onto grassy verges and lawns adjoining urban wetlands. In years of low rainfall, water levels in swamps and lakes may become so low during summer that swans with recently hatched young abandon the site and move their cygnets in search of suitable alternative food and water. At such times, swans with cygnets often cross or graze close to busy roadways, which has resulted in some being injured or killed.

To help reduce the number of these animals being injured or killed on local roads CALM and Main Roads need your assistance

People who see swans with cygnets attempting to cross local roads should quietly usher them away from the road, until the traffic is clear, before allowing them to cross. In certain instances, local police officers have been called to help control traffic and allow the safe passage of swans across the road. Take care, as adult swans are very protective of their young and attempts to move too close to them could be met with defensive hissing and charging. Young children in particular should not approach closely.

If swans are grazing on verges near roadways, but not attempting to cross, they should not be disturbed.

Some metropolitan wetlands where this seasonal activity occurs include Lake Monger, Herdsman Lake, North Lake, Bibra Lake, Claremont and Shenton Park Lakes.

## **DO NOT GO ONTO OR NEAR THE EDGE OF ANY ROAD TO RESCUE A SWAN OR CYGNETS.**

Extreme caution should be exercised by anyone venturing near a roadway. Do not attempt to go on to busy roads after swans. Drivers are asked to be particularly careful when driving alongside wetlands.

**For more information:** People driving past wetlands where signposting is considered inadequate can call Main Roads on (08) 9311 8333. If you find injured swans, orphaned cygnets or are concerned for the safety of swans with cygnets in a particular area call CALM's wildlife enquires on (08) 9334 0224 for advice or directions to your nearest wildlife carer.



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