

Black Swan

Species Description

Scientific name: *Cygnus atratus*

AKA: Alarch Ddu (Welsh)

Native to: Australia

Habitat: Large fresh and brackish water bodies

An easily recognisable swan, being the only species to have an almost entirely black plumage.

Black swan was first introduced to England in 1791, though the earliest record of successful breeding in the wild was not until 1902. The species, though rare, has a wide geographical spread throughout the British Isles. Up until 2005, fewer than 20 pairs were reported to be breeding across the UK.

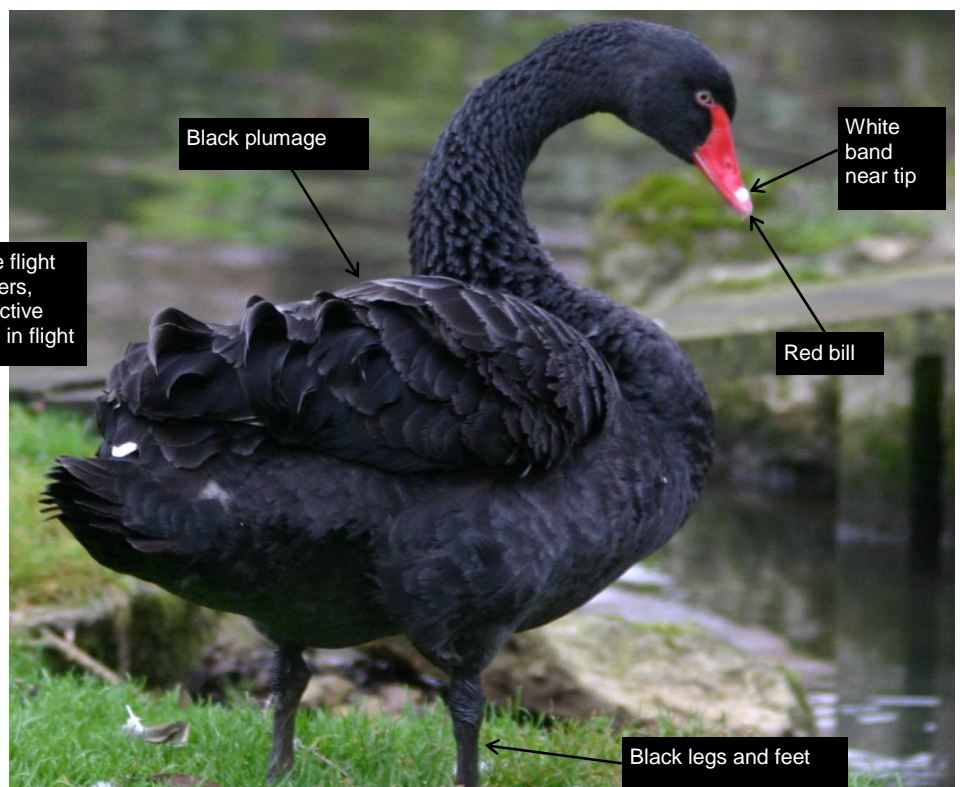
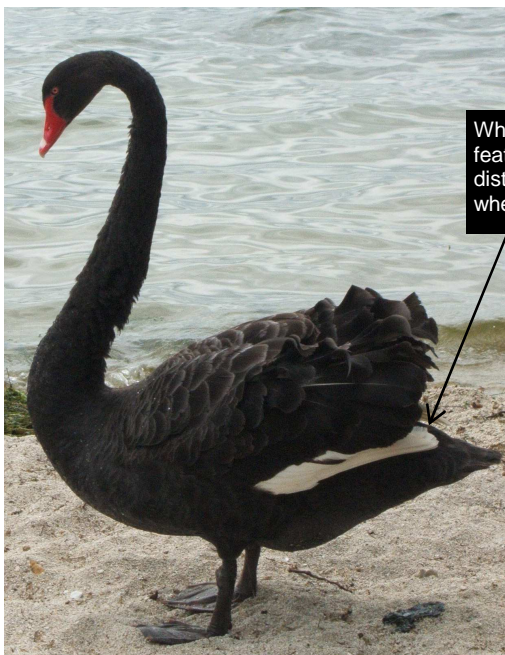
Black swan has the potential to be an agricultural pest, grazing and fouling grass and eating arable crops. The species is also known to be aggressive and can out-compete native species of wildfowl.

Black Swan is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England and Wales. As such, it is an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features



Identification throughout the year

Black swan is resident in the UK throughout the year and retains its dark plumage in all seasons. This species breeds between February and September, with young remaining with their parents until the following breeding season. Cygnets are grey, fluffy and are unlikely to be found far from their parents.

Field Signs

- Call - High pitched bugling.

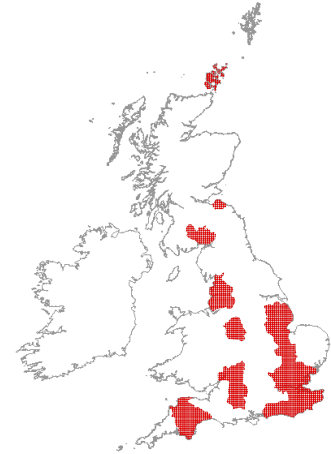
The following field signs are shared by mute swan and some other waterfowl so should not be used for the specific identification as black swan.

- Nest - Near water, usually consists of reeds and grasses.

Distribution

Pairs and individuals are recorded from widespread locations across the UK. This distribution map shows the areas in which breeding birds were recorded.

Source: Holling, M & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (2007)

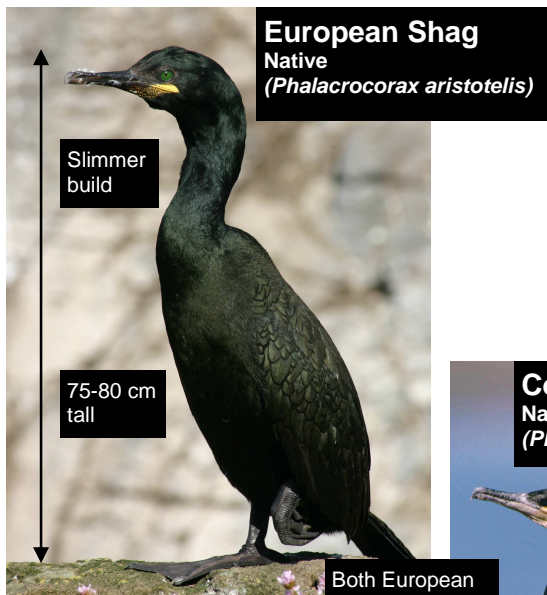


Similar Species

Black swan is a truly distinctive species. It should be noted that hybrids with native mute swan have been recorded in the wild in Europe and care should be taken with birds exhibiting characteristics of both species.

There are few native species in Great Britain with which black swan is likely to be confused. The only native large, black waterbirds present in Great Britain are the cormorant and European shag. However these are easily distinguished by their shape, size and colouration.

Black Swan
Non-native
(*Cygnus atratus*)
For comparison



European Shag
Native
(*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*)

Slimmer build

75-80 cm tall



Cormorant
Native
(*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Both European shag and cormorant may hold wings out to dry when standing on land

80-100 cm tall

References and further reading:

Lever, C (2005) "*Naturalised Birds of the World*". T & A D Poyser

Holling, M & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (2007) Non-native birds breeding in the United Kingdom in 2003, 2004 and 2005. *Brit. Birds* 100: 638–649

Madge, S and Burn, H. (1992) "*Wildfowl: An Identification to the Ducks, Geese and Swans of the World*". Christopher Helm

Mullarney, K, Svensson, L, Zetterstrom, D and Grant, PJ (2001) "*Bird Guide*". HarperCollins

Snow, DW and Perrins, CM (1998) "*The Birds of the Western Palearctic. Concise Edition*". Oxford University Press