



BLACK-NECKED SWAN

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Cygnus*
Species: *melanocoryphus*



Range: South South America

Habitat: Swamps, fresh water marshes, shallow lakes, lagoons

Niche: Diurnal, aquatic, omnivore

Wild diet: mostly vegetarian; aquatic plants with some insects and aquatic invertebrates

Zoo diet: Grains and vegetables (corn, peas, cooked carrots, yams)

Life Span: (Wild)
(Captivity)

Sexual dimorphism: Female slightly smaller and less pronounced knob or caruncle

Location in SF Zoo: Puente al Sur

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Black-necked swans have a white body with a black head and neck and pink legs and feet. They have a sky-blue bill and with a red knob (caruncle). Juveniles lack the knob and have grey and brown plumage. There is a variable white stripe that runs from the eye to the back of their head. The legs of this species are set farther back than other swan species. This adaptation is excellent for swimming, making the black-necked swan the most aquatic and best swimmers of the swans but also making it most awkward on land. For this reason, these swans stay in the water for greater periods of time and prefer larger bodies of water for their food supply. Taking off is difficult but once they get up in the air, they are strong and fast fliers, reaching speeds of about 50 miles per hour and covering long distances.

Weight: 8 - 17 lbs

Length: 39 – 48 inches

Wingspan: 70 inches

A swan's particularly long neck allows it to exploit a series of depths much greater than those normally reached by smaller ducks. By "upending", this swan can access food left untouched by other waterfowl. This swan has a jagged beak that allows it to filter nutrients from the water and a rough tongue that allows the black-necked swan to grip the slippery submerged vegetation it feeds on.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Listed as Least Concern on IUCN Red List. While the black-necked swan was eradicated in some parts of its range, it has colonized some parts of Chile, thanks in part to protection from hunting. Drainage of wetland areas continues to be a problem for this species, but the global population currently stands at approximately 93,000 birds. Black-necked swans sometimes suffer from lead poisoning from accidentally eating lead shot left in wetland areas by bird hunters. A main threat is wetland drainage and poor water quality.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Black-necked swans are quiet birds, but during their breeding season both sexes become very vocal; While most swans are known for loud honking calls, the black-necked swan has a soft whistling call.

A very social bird, black-necked swans mostly live in flocks but can become territorial and aggressive during mating season and separate into life-long mating pairs. Cobs are especially protective of the nest and eggs.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Black-necked swans breed for life. The red knob of the male swan becomes enlarged and darkens its red coloring. Breeding starts in early spring (single pairs or loose groups). The nests are built in reed beds or on small islands. A huge mound of vegetation is built, on which 4 to 8 eggs are laid. The female pen is the only one who incubates the eggs, while the male cob protects the nest and brings the female food. The chicks hatch after 36 days of incubation and fledge around 100 days. Both parents regularly carry the cygnets on their backs for up to 3 weeks.

Incubation: 36 days	Sexual Maturity:
# of Eggs: 4 - 7	Fledging: 100 days

MISCELLANEOUS

Black-necked swans are the largest waterfowl native to South America but are the smallest of their genus. They are also the fastest flier of their genus reaching speeds of 50 mph. Male swans are called cobs, females are known as pens and chicks are cygnets.

Sources:

The Handbook of the Birds of the World Vol I © 1996, Lynx Edicions

Ornamental Waterfowl © 1979 Kolbe

<http://www.sfzoo.org/>

<http://bioweb.uwlax.edu/>

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