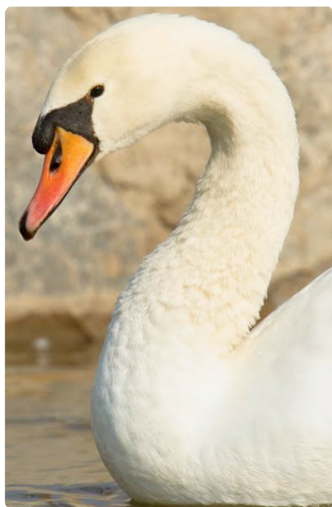


The Mute Swan

The mute swan (*cygnus olor*) is native to the UK unlike the migratory species such as the Bewick or Whooper swans which are differentiated by their yellow beaks. It is the largest flying bird in Britain.



Swans feed on natural green vegetation and aquatic plants in their water based environment here on the Norfolk Broads. When upending grit is taken in from the beds of the waterways to help their digestion. They have learned to supplement their diet with seed and bread offerings from humans.

The male or cob of a breeding pair is distinguished by the larger black knob at the top of its orange beak, compared to the female or pen.

Nesting time is about March and April. The swan cob selects up to three possible sites, with the final decision up to the pen. If it is a good place the pair may return to it in subsequent years.

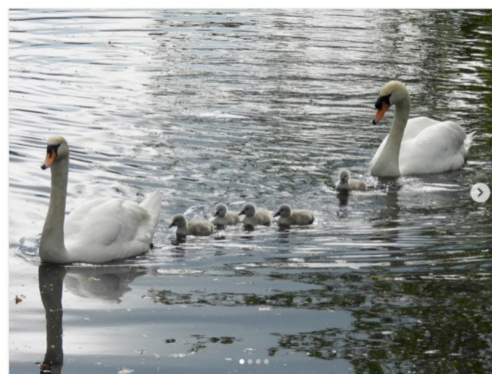


A swan's wingspan of 5ft or more powers the bird in flight up to 50mph. A take-off space is needed about 20-30ft and is dependent on wind-lift conditions. On landing, feet are outstretched like a pair of water skis.

Although for the most part they are silent, the 'mute' swan can communicate by squeals, hisses, a short burst of yelps by the female to keep her brood together. Grunts, snorts and whinnies are mainly placid by nature and the swan arches its wings in aggression and is protective of its offspring. A neck dance can be a prelude to the mating ritual, finishing with a bathing and preening time.

The mute swan is protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Appreciate and please be respectful towards these beautiful Broadland birds.

KEITH GLEN-WEST FRSPH
(Swan Handler)



Natural materials are collected such as small branches, reeds and rushes, topped by down plucked from the pen's underside. In an urban setting recycled discarded litter may even be included. The structure is about 3ft – 5ft across and 1ft – 2ft high. It must be capable of supporting the size of a swan which can be anything from 18lbs – 35lbs plus in weight and can stand up to 5ft tall.

It takes about 35 days for the eggs to hatch and a good clutch can be up to 12 eggs but 4 or 5 is more common.

The swan chicks start life with a pale greyish down and a dark grey bill. They soon venture onto the water and some will 'hitch a lift' on the pen's back. At this early stage they are at risk from natural predators such as pike and heron.

The juvenile cygnets are fully grown around October, fledglings with brown feathers. The feathers start turning white through the first winter and spring. Adult swans regrow their flight feathers in their annual moult.

