



Registered Charity 299254

Patrons: Sir Richard Branson, Mark Hunter, George Michael

Swan Lifeline Newsletter

Issue 66

www.swanlifeline.org.uk

New Year 2011

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We wish you all a very happy and prosperous New Year. As the last newsletter was so late we decided that you might appreciate it more now rather than have it amongst all the Christmas mail. We would mention that we do not wish to follow the route taken by so many charities of bombarding our readers with free pens, labels, cards etc to encourage donations. My usual response to these is the re-cycling bin and the determination not to support charities that waste their money this way. As you know our administration costs are minimal and the high cost of postage means that we no longer acknowledge membership renewals or issue membership cards and we encourage communication by e-mail where possible. Officially the membership year runs with the calendar therefore subscriptions are now due and the usual form is on page 4. We have also included the Bankers Order form in case you wish to make use of it. Do please let us know if you have moved or if you no longer wish to receive a newsletter.

Carmel did a fantastic job standing in whilst Wendy was on maternity leave but we were very pleased to welcome **Wendy** back to full time work in September - she started by organising the Open Day which we briefly reported on in the last newsletter. We ended up with almost £3000 as we had assistance from **Anne Ling** which led to matched funding of £700 from Santander. We have already set the date for the next Open Day as 4th September 2011.

We are delighted that Patron **Mark Hunter** and his rowing partner **Zac Purchase** won Gold Medals in the World Rowing Championships in New Zealand during November. As many of you know the 2012 Olympic Rowing events will be held at Dorney Lake. As with previous regattas and events of this nature any swans on the lake will need to be removed for the duration. A constant patrol is also mounted to ensure that the course is kept clear of Canada geese and any opportunist swans flying in. The umpires will not start a race with swans or geese on the course.

During November we were delighted to feature in an edition of **Countryfile** with **Matt Baker** taking time off from dancing to go out from Cuckoo Weir on a release of some of the local swans. I was able to contact a number of you so that you were able to watch and we understand that some of the programme was repeated over Christmas. We always emphasise that we are not a sanctuary and our aim is to return swans to their natural habitat, we were pleased that this was made clear on the programme.

Our 2009 accounts have been filed with the Charity Commission; contact us if you would like a copy. **Kay**

Forthcoming Events/Fundraising

Swan Upping Trip	20 th July
Open Day	4 th September
Eton Action Fair	24 th September

We did manage the Chertsey Charity Fair and many people mentioned they had seen us on Countryfile. The virtual blizzard the weekend before Christmas prevented our attendance at the Charity event at Pets at Home, New Malden.

With even more snow this year we hope to have a new snowy Christmas card.

Cuckoo Weir News

During the very cold spell some birds decided that they would like to re-admit themselves for a free meal or two causing extra work so new volunteers are always welcome.

The two new front pens were finally completed in early October. The netting is very strong and of a sufficiently narrow gauge to ensure that the mink cannot get in. Whilst mink do not, as a rule, attack fully fit adult swans they certainly injure and sometimes kill cygnets added to which the swans in care are not always able to defend themselves within the confines of a pen. These two pens cost over £11,000 - we were assisted with the expense with a £5000 grant from the **Waterways Trust** and £3000 from the **Support Adoption for Pets Scheme** run by **Pets at Home**. The rest of all the original ponds and pens also need attention. The blizzard in December badly affected some of the older pens and we are therefore proceeding with more renewals as it would be uneconomic to patch them up only to re do them in a year or two. The average cost for each will be £5000. The cost is high as we have decided that it will be in

our long term interest to have heavy duty fencing which is purpose built to order as this is mink resistant and eliminates much of the rat problem. The pens are covered with tensioned netting, not in an attempt to prevent the swans from leaving but in an endeavour to exclude all other birds than those in care. **Kay**

Swan Stories

As we always say it is the people who see the swans every day who get to know them and are often the first to notice any problems. The following is a first class illustration of this.

For a number of years we had a pair of swans living on our large pond/small lake (Barry and Inga) named by Wendy when she was very new in her job. This pair had several broods of cygnets and when each new breeding season came around Swan Lifeline would kindly come out and rescue the grown up cygnets from the aggressive attentions of their Dad.*

Two or three years ago the whole family disappeared when the current brood was only a few days old and after searching for ages we found them happily on the Thames between Boulters Lock and Cookham. It was not until this year that I found out a neighbour had seen them looking lost and he and his daughter had held up the traffic to allow them to cross the road and leave home.

I was therefore very surprised to see them back but rather dismayed because although the lake looks idyllic there is very little natural food for them and it costs me a fortune to feed them with wholemeal bread and corn. In the spring, with my assistance in gathering sticks and buying them a large bag of straw they built a superb nest on the bank and hatched six lovely cygnets. Unfortunately one did not survive, I think it probably got trodden on as I noticed it had quite a bad limp after just a day or two of life, but the remaining five grew to be quite large birds despite having an adventure and being rescued from Clappers Meadow by Swan Lifeline. **Frankie**** from Boulters Island was along on the rescue and thought he recognised the adult pair so they were returned by road in three cars, none the worse for wear. I understand it was quite a difficult job to catch them all, wading through nettles etc., which I thought very funny as if they had been left alone they would have found their way back along the ditch between our properties, having been out to enjoy the meadow grass on quite a few occasions!! However, on Tuesday this week I went out to lunch with a friend - stopped at Sainsbury's on the way home to buy fifteen wholemeal loaves, only to find that once again they had gone walkabout and so far I do not know where they are.

Brenda Barringer, Maidenhead - September 2010

* When we re-home disabled swans we do sometimes have to help out, if they breed, by taking the cygnets away. Although the cygnets are fully flighted it can be quite difficult for the young to learn to fly on a small lake. In general swans teach their youngsters to fly and then will often fly with them to an area where there are plenty of single swans - the parents then leave the

young behind and go back to their own territory and will defend it against all comers including their own young. (I know of human parents who think that they might quite like to copy this tactic!) At the beginning of October we start releasing the cygnets that have grown up in care. We wait until other youngsters start appearing in the flocks and, given that by this time they should be learning to fly, they go out.

** **Frankie** who has been a rescuer for many years also rescued a neighbour who was crushed by a tree on Boulters Lock Island; a neighbour kindly sent us a donation after the event.

Some days are like this!

The day started quietly enough- a few heavy showers after a week of sunshine- well it would it was the Sunday of the Open day at Cuckoo Weir! I set off at 10am to check on a small lonely cygnet at Aldermaston Wharf. He seemed to have been left behind although the family had been seen the previous morning and several people said they would observe and let me know if he was still on his own in a couple of days. So on to Alder Bridge to check on a pen whose smallest of six cygnets had been tied to her with fishing line the day before. I had been able to catch him as he had broken free and survived with 15 yards of double line leading from his neck into the middle of the river. I couldn't catch the pen as she was spooked by this time. This morning she seemed OK - would need checking again later in the week as she had had line trailing from her mouth.

I arrived home just as a call came in from Cuckoo Weir. A swan that had been described as 'Wobbly, Pink and Listing' had been seen at Thanet Mouth in Reading. It had been reported the previous evening but had disappeared into the dusk when our volunteer went out - now it had re-appeared. I had only driven 100 yards when Helena rang again - another swan was badly tackled at the Thames Valley Park in Reading - could I go there first? On arrival there the swan just walked up to me for food so I grabbed him. He had line round both legs and a wing with a float and weights hanging off his B.T.O ring - but he was only interested in food! The lady who had reported him was there with three large playful dogs running loose. As I was I was untangling the line one of the dogs bounced me over and the swan fled into the river still trailing line and float. I was about to hook him when 'W, P & L' came drifting by! I was able to hook him easily, and went back to the tackled cob who was now trying to get out of the water again. I was able to grab him and got on with the detackling - with the help of, by now, five playful dogs running round me. The laughing owners both insisting that the swans didn't mind the dogs "They are used to them"! It was a relief to get away to Cuckoo Weir, where the Open Day was in full swing in brilliant sunshine, and get 'W, P & L' admitted.

After a cuppa and a bun I headed for home, I had gone only fifteen miles when Helena rang - "would you be able to go on to Witney Fishing Lakes? A cygnet has been tethered to a patch of water lilies for two hours!" I worked out a route, phoned the informant to say I'd be

at least an hour. The Linear Lakes were actually nearer Standlake, slightly closer only 55 miles!

I arrived just over an hour later, found States Lagoon and drove round as far as I could, then walked the rest carrying hook, bag and food. The large cygnet was going round in circles in the water lilies about 200 yards into the lake and, of course, no boat available. I know we rescuers often work miracles but walking on water is not one of them! As I wondered what to do the parents who had been feeding further away suddenly noticed me and the fisherman and flew at us low across the water close to the cygnet. He panicked and at last managed to break free and make for the rushes and shrubs on the bank further away from me. I grabbed my hook and bread and legged it round the lake and there on the bank was the cygnet staggering about, both legs and wings caught up in line. I scooped him up, tucked him 'back to front' under my arm and tried to free him. It became obvious I needed another pair of hands to help undo the tangles so I walked back to the fisherman. As I got near I could hear him shouting and splashing about as he was trying to land an enormous carp. This was complicated by a determined attack by the pair who thought the carp thrashing about in the landing net was their cygnet as they were about the same size and colour! There followed a frantic sequence with me fending off the pair with my pole in one hand, the cygnet shrieking still 'back to front' under my other arm and the fisherman trying to unhook the carp. Eventually I was able to lead the pair away from him and his three other rods, by showing them their cygnet and throwing bread. I hid behind some shrubs and began to untangle the cygnet at last, then I heard some scrabbling behind me in the bushes and there behind me was the irate cob charging towards me! I managed to push him with my hook into the margin of the lake, free the cygnet that was by now terrified of his father and put him in the lake a little further away.

I walked back to the fisherman to collect my bags etc "Well done" he said "have you got a moment? Could you take a photo of me with the carp?" Then there was a 'Have you been framed' interlude while he struggled to embrace the carp in the most photogenic pose - carp not very co-operative. I took a couple of shots - him with a huge grin - not sure about the carp by now. As I left the swans were feeding peacefully on weed, as if nothing had happened.

Diana Davies

Lost in translation

Well it had been a tough afternoon, a call had come in from Sandford Lock - a cob and one of his cygnets were tied together with fishing line and were panicking in the river. After an eighteen mile dash I arrived, the line had snapped but the cob still had the hook in his foot and the cygnet was trailing the line and float from his leg. I decided to grab the cygnet first and de-tackled him quickly but held on to him hoping his squeaking would tempt the cob to attack me and come to his rescue - which he did. In the ensuing kerfuffle I got rather wet and my Rescuers T-shirt was ripped and I had several livid scratches on my arms. But at least

the hook was only jammed in the cob's BTO ring - so no damage done, except to me!

Driving home I decided that a takeaway was definitely required as it was getting late. As I arrived, bloody but unbowed, at my local Chinese restaurant I was greeted politely in spite of my appearance! "Madam you look very tired tonight. Have you been busy?" "Yes I said I have been swan rescuing." "Swan wrestling? What is that?" "No, no." I said "Not swan wrestling, swan resc...." - oh I don't know though - you could be right!"

Diana Davies

Incidents of problems caused by BTO and Darvic rings are thankfully rare and the usefulness of the rings definitely outweighs any negative aspects. We keep records of admitted swans on the computer and it ensures that we know any treatment given in the past. The large white Darvic rings can be read when a swan is in the water which can be very helpful.

We received a call from a member of the public saying that there was a swan on a roof of a building opposite her office so I left Cuckoo Weir with Jo in tow. We finally sighted the swan (it was difficult to see as it was on top of a very high building). Once we entered the building we were met by a very nice lady and taken to the top floor. I got more that I bargained for when the lady said "Are you OK to go on the roof? We usually use harnesses!" The first thing that entered my mind was - yes that means we can call the Fire Service (especially as I love to see a man in uniform) what more could I ask! On second thoughts I didn't want to let on that I have a fear of really big heights so I got brave and climbed this narrow ladder that I had to pull from the roof. Once on the roof the swan was just sitting there without a care in the world; I managed to grab the swan and Jo helped me put it in the wrap and bag. We had amazing views of Windsor Castle. The swan had no injuries but if it wasn't for the MOP calling it would have probably died as it was trapped on the roof without any way of escaping. I hadn't had much of a problem going up but coming down was a different issue, I looked down whilst holding the swan and quietly whispered to Jo "I can't" but I stepped back stood on the ladder and didn't look down. One amusing thing was that as I was about to go down the ladder I heard a voice say "Do you need any help? I'm from pest control" so I passed the swan down to him. Once the swan was checked out at CWI it was released to the flock at Windsor.

Wendy



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Membership Rates for 12 months

Individual: £ 10.00 Family: £15.00 Under 16s & seniors: £ 8.00 Groups: £25.00

Please make cheques or postal orders payable to 'Swan Lifeline' and send to Kay Webb.

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

Tel Number.....e-mail.....

I enclose: £..... subscription and/or donation £.....

If you are a taxpayer and have not yet completed a Gift Aid donation please fill in just below. If you have already completed one, there is no need to re-send it.

Name.....

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

This declaration covers all donations I have made since 6 April 2000 and all donations I make hereafter.

SignatureDate

Please remember to notify Swan Lifeline if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donation (until 5 April 2011, 28 pence for every pound you give then only 25p per pound).

BANKER'S ORDER FORM

To the Manager (name and address of your bank)

Please pay Swan Lifeline at Cafcash Ltd., Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent, ME19 4TA (sort code 40-52-40)
a/c no.00004525 £..... annually starting on..... (Date) until further notice,
and debit my account no.....sort code.....

Name..... Mr/Mrs/Ms/Title

Address.....

.....Postcode.....

SignatureDate

Please return completed Banker's Order to: **Ms Frances Overman, 3 Derwent Close, Feltham Middlesex TW14 9QL**