

# The Black-necked Swan — from the Pampas and Places of Penguins

(*Cygnus melanocoryphus*)

## Part I

by Josef H. Lindholm, III  
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Due to the Editor's omission of the opening paragraph of Mr. Lindholm's article on Redheads (*Aythya americana*), in the previous issue of "Watchbird," the following persons were not clearly identified: Monica Fehse, Fort Worth Zoo's Registrar, regularly issues the highly detailed inventory of the bird collection, referred to in the first sentence. Elizabeth Glassco, Assistant Curator of Birds at Fort Worth since December 1991, was, until then, Lead Keeper of Birds at the National Zoological Park, Washington, D.C. Brad Hazelton, Keeper II, Birds, at Fort Worth, is responsible for most of the Zoo's extensive collection of waterfowl. Lisa Weedn, Keeper I, Birds, assisted Mr. Hazelton with hand-rearing last season.

For many people, English stately homes and their attendant grounds might bring to mind sedate images of high teas, croquet matches, ballroom dances, and drawing room conversations, punctuated by the occasional fox hunt. At Knowsley Hall, near Liverpool, however, from 1806 to 1851, activities of a less orthodox nature were frequent.

Mud balls from the Gambia arrived in 1843, and, placed in tanks in the Knowsley hot houses, duly produced the first African Lungfish seen alive in England (Woolfall, 1990). That same year a living boa constrictor was sent to the London Zoo, and a dead Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle (which had lived at Knowsley for at least seven years) to the British Museum (Ibid, 1990). Queen Victoria sent Angora Goats to Knowsley Hall from Buckingham Palace (Ibid., 1990). While living there in the 1830s, painting their grandfather's squirrels, guans,

genets and other creatures, young Edward Lear entertained the children at Knowsley with scores of illustrated limericks, poems, and stories concerning the doings of owls, pussycats, and other entities, which, when later compiled as "The Book of Nonsense," immortalized his name beyond all the natural history illustrations and landscapes he was to produce in his long life.

No less a person than John Gould was requested by letter to inspect three "Budgerie Gar" in the possession of a Mr. Barlow, in London, in 1846. That eminent ornithologist and illustrator's report must have been favorable, as in 1848, he received a further letter from Knowsley Hall stating, "I have the pleasure to tell you we have been surprised here by the first of a pair of the *Melopsittacus undulatus* breeding" — the first captive breeding of Budgies (Woolfall, 1990).

John James Audubon crossed the Atlantic repeatedly between 1827 and 1838, the eleven years it took to publish *Birds of America*, supervising the engraving and soliciting new subscriptions, and, when he was in England, he knew he had a place to stay at Knowsley Hall. On one visit he brought Passenger Pigeons. They bred at Knowsley in 1832, another of the (at least) sixteen avian first captive breeding records accomplished there (Ibid, 1990). They did so well, they were eventually turned loose on the grounds. And, in 1851, Admiral Phipps Hornby, Commander-in-Chief in the Pacific of her Majesty's Fleet, arrived at Knowsley with Black-necked Swans, a gift for his brother-in-law (Delacour, 1954, Kear, 1990).

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Geese in the then most impressive list of 24 species of ducks, geese and swans bred at Knowsley Hall (Kear, 1990, Woolfall, 1990). For 1851 was also the year that the Admiral's brother-in-law, Lord Edward Geoffrey Smith Stanley, 13th Earl of Derby (yes, both the Derbys Parakeet and the Stanley Rosella honor his names) died at the age of 76. Starting in 1806, with the expansion of

his late father's neglected aviary, the 13th Earl eventually obtained 619 species of birds (of which he bred 75), and 191 mammal species (breeding 38) (Woolfall, 1990). He died June 30, and in October, 318 species of birds and 94 species of mammals, practically the entire Knowsley menagerie, were sold at auction in Covent Garden, at the direction of the 14th Earl, then involved in the machina-

tions that were to make him Prime Minister of England several months later (Woolfall, 1990, Kear, 1990). The profusely illustrated auction catalogue is itself now a much prized object in rare book collections.

The catalogue lists six Black-necked Swans (Woolfall, 1990). Two of them never saw the auctioneer's block, becoming instead the 14th Earl's gift to Queen Victoria, joining the 13th Earl's bequest of all five of the Himalayan Monals to Her Majesty (Kear, 1990, Woolfall, 1990). What became of them at Windsor Castle, history does not record. Likewise, three of the other Black-necked Swans disappeared into obscurity. The sixth, however, was bought by the Zoological Society of London, where, at the Society's Gardens at Regent's Park, it joined another bird that had arrived, also from Knowsley, in 1848 (Woolfall, 1990). This earlier bird is a mystery, as we otherwise know nothing of its origins. It is widely believed the Black-necked Swans Admiral Hornby brought in 1851 were the first in England, but that is obviously not the case.

At any rate, the bird bought at auction in 1851, and the one from Knowsley Hall in 1848 produced cygnets at London Zoo in 1857, the first English breeding, but not the first in captivity. The Antwerp Zoo appears to have achieved this record in 1847, a year after it obtained what Jean Delacour (1954) believed were the first Black-necked Swans in Europe. It is possible that the bird sent from Knowsley Hall to the London Zoo in 1848 hatched at Antwerp, a collection renowned in its first 70 years for purveying animals to other collections. The Antwerp Royal Zoological Society, established in 1843, by the 1850's at least, held a yearly animal auction (increased to two a year in 1878), which was patronized by zoo men from throughout Europe, and was selling not only creatures bred at Antwerp and other zoos, but specimens imported expressly for these auctions as well. In common with so many European zoos, Antwerp's records were lost during one or the other of this century's World Wars. Marvin Jones, Registrar for the Zoological Society of San Diego, and an incomparable hunter of zoo history, was delighted to discover, some years ago, in the City Archives of Amsterdam, Antwerp Zoo auction catalogues dating from 1854 to 1912. He has no reason to believe there

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*Black-necked Swans, hatched at Fort Worth Zoo in February, 1992, at a little more than a week old.*

might not have been earlier ones. Mr. Jones informs me he only skimmed these lists, while noting the presence of Javan Tigers, Atlas Lions, Quaggas, and true Burchell's Zebras (all now extinct — at least in a pure state), Whooping Cranes ("virtually every year" along with Siberian White Cranes), Barbary Stags, Aye-Ayes, and other startling rarities. He did, however, write down one listing of Black-necked Swans: birds hatched in 1875, offered for that year's auction. Writing about Antwerp Zoo's 1846 Black-necks, Jean Delacour (1954) states: "They soon bred, apparently in the following year. One pair produced three clutches and raised 15 cygnets in a year." Thus it seems quite possible that the 1857 first British breeding at London Zoo was a partial second generation breeding.

According to Delacour (1954), following the London hatchings, Black-necked Swans "soon became well established in captivity and many were successfully reared during the following years, in England as well as on the continent." He goes on to describe a French breeder who mass-produced this species:

"One of the most successful breeders of Black-necked Swans in the later part of the nineteenth century was M. Maillard, at Le Croisic, Brittany. He acquired a pair in 1880, raised five

cygnets the first year, and many more later on. From three pairs, he reared a couple of dozen young each season. It was his habit to take the eggs so that the birds soon laid again, and thus from each pair, three clutches were often obtained. Each pair was accommodated with a pond 75x45 feet, and a pen 30x30 feet. They were fed various grains, boiled rice, and soaked bread, and ate a great deal of grass and other greens.

"The chicks were usually reared by domestic geese, and fed duckweed and egg yolks at first, followed by bread and milk, minced meat, boiled rice and grain."

Needless to say, the four years of mayhem, chaos and austerity during the first World War had a devastating affect on European aviculture in general. The most notorious avicultural disaster was the total destruction of the aviaries of Jean Delacour (then 28), at Villers-Bretonneux, Piccardy, in April 1918 (Renshaw, 1918). By 1920, Delacour created a magnificent new collection at Cleres, in Normandy, and among the many birds obtained that year were "a young imported pair" of Black-necked Swans, "established on a fair-sized, shady pond below a waterfall" (Delacour, 1954).

For the next twenty years, this pair of swans never failed to rear young.

Delacour (1954) described them, "We let them incubate their young and raise the cygnets. The parents and their brood looked lovely against the background of the falls. In a few cases, when the eggs were taken away or the nest disturbed, they had a second clutch. They usually laid in April, making a large nest near the water on a high bank, wherever bunches of straw and rushes had been placed at their disposal. They were excellent parents. A day after hatching they took the chicks to the water. . . . This excellent breeding pair was lost in 1940 during the German invasion. . . ."

Contemplating the re-opening of Cleres as a public zoo, Jean Delacour (1947) observed, "My old breeding pair of Black-necked Swans, that for twenty years reared young at Cleres, have naturally vanished, and the species is now terribly scarce in captivity. But pairs of their offspring at Leckford and in Holland, at Mr. Schuyt's have bred this year, and I hope that, later on, a new Black-necked menage will replace their grandparents in the pretty pool by the waterfall at the end of the lake, now temporarily occupied by a handsome but vulgar pair of Mute Swans."

Describing the further restoration of Cleres, Delacour (1949) wrote: "Flamingos, Black-necked Swans,



many peafowl, pheasants, geese, ducks have been sent recently from the United States. . . ." In its second annual report, for 1948-49, the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, England (shortly destined to become the largest collection of ducks, geese and swans ever assembled) inventoried two young pairs of Black-necked Swans (Anon. 1949). One male came from the aforementioned D. G. Schuyl, a female from Leckford, the aviaries of British Department Store magnate John Spedan Lewis, while the second pair was shipped from New York, to where they had been imported by an unnamed dealer. Delacour's American pair likewise must have been imports from South America, since, by the 50's, he did not believe this species had ever been successfully bred in the U.S. (Delacour, 1954).

Delacour (1954) mentioned eggs had been laid at the private collection of Mr. C.L. Sibley in Connecticut, and the Chicago Zoological Gardens (Brookfield Zoo). According to Greenwell and Sturgeon (1988), the first North American breeding did take place at Brookfield Zoo in 1946. It is mentioned that this record was recorded by Karl Plath, the Chicago Zoological Society's first and long-time curator of birds, and relayed to Guy Greenwall by letter, from G. Michael Flieg (Brookfield's curator at the time), on February 20, 1970. Karl Plath was a highly prolific writer for avicultural journals, yet I have otherwise found no published record of this achievement. In light of this, and the fact that Plath was a cordial friend of Jean Delacour, this U.S. first breeding record is somewhat mysterious.

At any rate, from the table I have compiled from the breeding records of the *International Zoo Yearbook* (Zoological Society of London, 1960-1991), it can be seen that, from 1960, U.S. public zoo breedings have steadily increased over the years. As an update, the December 31, 1991 *Abstract* of the International Species Inventory System (1992), indicates that in 1991, Black-necked Swans were hatched at: Baton Rouge - 2, Columbia, S.C. (Riverbanks Zoo) - 2, Columbus - 4, Fort Worth - 1, Louisville - 2, Memphis - 6, Miami (Metro Zoo) - 9, Oklahoma City - 6, Phoenix Zoo - 1, Salisbury, Maryland - 3, San Antonio Zoo - 3, Tampa (Lowry Park) - 1, and Tyler, TX (Caldwell Zoo) - 4. The ISIS abstract lists a total of 53

males, 62 females, and 17 unsexed birds in 43 U.S. collections.

From the *IZY* table, it can be seen that the Fort Worth Zoological Park has been particularly successful in breeding Black-necked Swans, an achievement recognized by the American Federation of Aviculture, when it presented Fort Worth with an AVY award at the AFA National Convention in 1990. This AVY was specifically "Zoo Category I - for outstanding progress in the establishment of an individual species or group of related birds . . . to recognize those zoos which have successfully bred birds on a consistent basis" (Thompson, 1989).

The data submitted to the AVY Awards Committee was researched and compiled by Christopher Brown, then Assistant Supervisor, Birds (Curator of Birds since July, 1991), from the Fort Worth Zoo files. I am indebted to him for making it available to me.

The statistics from the *International Zoo Yearbook* are actually incomplete; while there were no hatchings in 1985, four cygnets hatched in 1984, so that a total of 94 were actually hatched during the period covered by the *IZY*.

From 1970 to 1974, all the cygnets hatched were produced by a pair purchased April 16, 1969, from the dealer Dan Southwick. No indication is noted as to where Southwick obtained them. Ronald Kimbell, then Supervisor of Birds recorded that they appeared to be young adults, had pale legs, "not much breast meat," and were "probably pinioned as chicks." In 1970, "Torpedo" and "Mrs.", as this pair was named, hatched and reared three cygnets. In 1971, one of that year's four young died, while two of the three 1972 offspring perished. All of the four 1973 cygnets lived, but two of the seven hatched in 1974 failed to survive.

In 1975, two of the 1973 offspring hatched two chicks, both dying, while out of the eight babies their parents produced that year, only one lived. In 1976, three pairs hatched young; "Torpedo" and "Mrs." produced five, three dying, the 1973 pair raised all three of theirs, while another 1973 Fort Worth male, and a female hatched there in 1974 likewise raised the three they hatched. This last pair failed to produce any cygnets in 1977, while the 1973 pair lost three of the four hatched that year and the old pair lost the only one

they hatched. 1978 was a poor year; only the original pair produced offspring - a single cygnet that died. In 1979, they were again the only pair to reproduce, rearing only one out of five hatchlings.

In 1980, the 1973 pair reared two of the four cygnets hatched that year, and their parents hatched four, rearing three. In 1981 the old pair were the only breeders that year, producing eight and raising three. This pair produced two broods in 1982, rearing all five from their first clutch, but losing all four from their second. In 1982, the 1973 pair also hatched cygnets, rearing all three of theirs.

In 1983, the 1973 male died, and his mate was sold, but not before they hatched and reared three cygnets. That year, the original pair hatched five, rearing three, and in 1984, they alone bred, hatching and rearing four. Nothing was produced in 1985, but that year, Fort Worth Zoo's current main breeding pair were set up; a male, hatched at Fort Worth in 1984, and a female obtained from the aviculturist Jean Walker in 1985.

In 1986, the original pair again failed to produce any cygnets, but the new pair hatched and reared four. This pair hatched seven the following year, raising four, while the old pair lost the only offspring they produced that year. They again hatched and lost a single cygnet in 1988, then "Mrs." died that year, after nearly twenty years at Fort Worth. "Torpedo," her mate, died six months later, supporting the age-old traditions associated with swans and other birds that "mate for life." The pair established in 1985 hatched four young in 1988, rearing three. Chris Brown's data for the AVY Awards committee extends to 1989, when the 1985 pair hatched and reared three young.

From Ronald Kimbell's notes in the Fort Worth Zoo files, I found that four cygnets, from two different clutches, were raised in 1990 by the 1985 pair. One of these, a male, was retained, and now forms Fort Worth's second breeding pair, with a female hatched in 1990, from Arkansas aviculturist Jim Wheeler, who obtained the other three 1990 Fort Worth Black-necks. In 1991, the 1985 pair hatched only one cygnet. The 1992 season has, even so far, been a different matter all together. ●

**PART II** will continue in the next issue.