

MUTES TAKE EATOCK!

The results of the North West Swan Study give an incredible insight into the ups and downs of our native mutes. An endless series of mini soaps, some end in tragedy, others in triumph.

I would like to focus on what to date is a success story - that of CAP and CIU, at Westhoughton's Eatock Lodge. Whilst checking for toads in late March, I spotted a pair building a nest. CAP is something of an old friend. He was born at Birkacre lodge in 1994, a site we have worked on with Chorley C.V. The locals informed me that the swans had already had one clutch of eggs stolen, so this was their second attempt.

The new nest was on a patch of grass next to a path, vulnerable to both dogs and egg thieves. I left with the thought that this would be the first and last time that mutes attempted to breed at Eatock.

That night I phoned Judith Smith "Could do with a fence" she noted "at least it will keep the dogs off". A series of phone calls and I'm off on a new learning curve. Angela (Bolton Wildlife Angela) can supply fencing materials and volunteers, but what if the swans attack us whilst we're working? Lots of reassurances from the swan people "Swan aggression is grossly over rated" Wes pointed out "They've only broke my ribs once and that was my fault".

Speed is obviously of the essence, the fence must be in place whilst we still have something to protect. Tuesday arrives - me, Angela and four volunteers

arrive at Eatock. CIU's on the nest, Cap's on patrol. I give a brief intro with lots of assurances on how friendly swans are and it's only occasionally they break people's ribs.

Cap's huge, perhaps I should have stuck with newts. Let's do it as quickly as possible to minimise disturbance, half an hour should see us straight. Two hours later and we're still at it. Ever tried driving posts into colliery spoil? I would not recommend it. At last the fence was up, CAP showed no interest in us and CIU moved only once to turn her six eggs. My fears about CAP eating us proved to be totally unfounded. On subsequent visits he turned out to be a real sweetie as far as male swans go. Tolerant of the other wildfowl on the lodge, at one point I saw him allow ducklings to swim along side him, he saves his aggression for the local dogs.

Our one big concern was if CAP decided to walk the cygnets to the nearest large waterbody - Bellhouse. Unfortunately, the lodge already holds a pair with young. The cob is a real big boy - old and experienced. If CAP arrives then a battle royal will occur with the resident 'Beast of Bellhouse' - odds on favorite. Once he's sorted out CAP, he'll turn his attentions to the cygnets, with very lethal consequences. Fortunately to date, this particular scenario has not occurred.

Many thanks to Angela and the four volunteers, the fence has done its job. The cygnets are over three weeks old and growing quickly. One bit of bad news, as I am writing this article, one of the babies has a hook in its beak. Went around to check, looks like Judith has been, the hook is gone. Mixed blessing these anglers, discarded hooks and lines can cause problems, but at Eatock, the fishermen effectively deter egg thieves and one even helped us put up the fence.

What a life these swans have! Take CAP for instance, born in Chorley, spends five years cruising the North West, eventually bumps into a lass from Blackburn, takes her to a nice little place on the outskirts of 'Cowyed City'. He certainly knows how to give a girl a good time.

What fate awaits the son of CAP? Next spring a remarkable change will occur, CAP2 changes from a defenceless offspring into a rival male. CAP will turn on his son and actively drive him off. The young swan will become a nomad and embark on a five year search of the Lancashire wetlands (or beyond), and with luck he will eventually find a new home and settle down. The Darvic ring on his left leg should help us to work out the next episode of this on going story.

Rick Parker



Firstly, to Brian Kelly, Alan Stenhouse and Mike Fisher for landing new jobs - Well Done and Good Luck in the Future!

Secondly, a BIG Well Done to Louise Fisher for getting Double A's In her psychology A'level course work. Good Luck in your end of year exams.

Lastly congratulations to the Bolton Greenwood Group for a successful open day. Thanks to the BCV for your support.



Building the fence at Eatock