

IS THIS A BEWICK'S SWAN?

A handy guide to identifying Europe's swans.

1. WHAT COLOUR IS IT?

White – go to 2

Grey/brown – go to 3

Can't tell. It's silhouetted against the sky – go to 4

2. WHAT COLOUR IS ITS BILL?

Orange and black – it's a MUTE SWAN

Yellow and black – go to 5

3. DOES IT HAVE A LONG NECK?

No – it's probably a goose

Yes – go to 6

4. IS ITS NECK AS LONG AS ITS BODY?

No – it's probably a goose

Yes – go to 7

5. IS THERE MORE YELLOW THAN BLACK ON ITS BILL?

Yes – it's a WHOOPER SWAN

No – it's a BEWICK'S SWAN

Can't tell – go to 8

6. It's a juvenile swan. IS IT WITH OTHER BIRDS?

Yes, white birds – those are the adults, go to 2

No. It is hard to tell different species of swan apart while they are young. Listen to the audio to see if you can tell which species it is.

7. DOES IT HAVE LONG LEGS?

Yes – it's a crane or a stork

No – it's a swan. It's hard to tell different species of swan apart when they're in flight though. Listen to the audio to see if you can tell which species it is.

8. It can be hard to tell the difference between whooper swans and Bewick's swans. Whoopers are larger, with longer necks that they hold with more of a bend. Look at the pictures to see if you can tell which species it is.



BEWICKS' SWAN

More compact than whooper swan with shorter neck. Bill slightly less yellow than black and the yellow is generally a rounded patch



Call

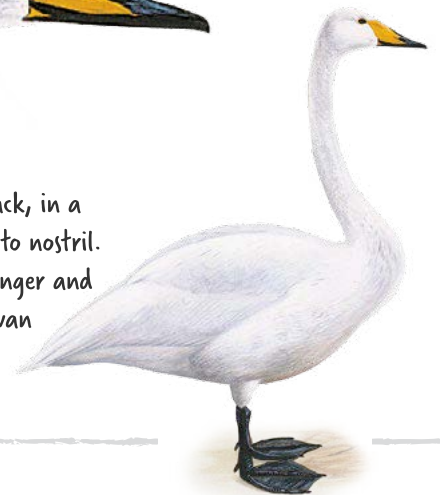


WHOOPER SWAN

Bill more yellow than black, in a triangle formation close to nostril. Distinctive head shape, longer and straighter than Bewick swan



Call



MUTE SWAN

Largest of the three swans, orange bill with obvious black knob. Called a knob swan across most of Europe because of its bill shape



Wing noise in flight



BEWICK'S SWANS

It is illegal to kill or injure Bewick's swans anywhere in Europe or western Russia.

Bewick's swans look similar to other swan species, especially whooper swans, but they are in trouble. The number of Bewick's swans in Europe and western Russia has declined by 40% in the last 20 years. There are fewer than 18,000 left.

Bewick's swans complete an extraordinary migration. Each year they travel 8,000km from the Russian arctic across northern Europe and back again.

Loss of wetlands

The journey is very hard and along the way the swans stop at wetlands to rest and feed before continuing their journey. Wetlands are also very useful for people and many wetlands have been adapted for human use, by draining to make places to live or farmland. The remaining wetlands are often used by people for recreation, but if those hobbies repeatedly disturb the swans from feeding and resting, then they're less likely to successfully complete their journey.

Illegal shooting

Scientists have found from x-rays that more than 1/3 of living Bewick's swans have been shot. This means that a lot of swans are being shot, either intentionally or by mistake, even though it is illegal to shoot Bewick's swans.

Lead poisoning

Shooting with lead shot can harm Bewick's swans even if they are not directly shot or disturbed. Lead is poisonous and Bewick's swan mistakenly eat spent lead shot that falls to the ground. Just a small number of lead pellets is enough to make a swan very sick and could even kill it.

Collisions with powerlines

Bewick's swans, and other large birds, are known to collide with power lines and die. The lines can be hard to see against the sky, especially in low light.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. If you find an injured swan, call a vet.
2. If you are concerned that power lines near you are a risk to swans, contact the power company. They may be able to fit bird diverters to the lines so they are more visible. Fewer collisions means fewer power cuts too, so preventing them is good for everyone!
3. If you shoot, please consider using non-toxic shot, such as steel.
4. Learn how to tell the difference between the different swans and geese. Tell other people and let them know that Bewick's swans are in trouble.
5. If you do an activity near water that might disturb Bewick's swans or other birds that rely on wetlands, then contact your local nature organisation. They can advise when and where activities will have less impact on the birds. And let others know, they may not be aware that disturbing birds can seriously reduce their chances of completing their migration.
6. Support your local wildlife organisation. Now that you know the difference between the different swans, you could help monitor them.
7. You can report sightings of Bewick's swans, along with details of their ring, location and date to colourmarkedswans@wwt.org.uk



FLIGHT OF
THE SWANS



WWT

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flightoftheswans.org