



Registered Charity No: 299254

Chairman: Kay Webb

Patron: Sir Richard Branson
George Michael

Swan Lifeline

Cuckoo Weir Island
South Meadow Lane
Eton
Berkshire SL4 6SS

Tel: 01753 859397
Fax: 01753 622709

www.swanlifeline.com

NEWSLETTER 53

SPRING 2006

As we go to press the news is all that of **bird flu**. We are putting contingency plans in place in case it does reach the UK. Our rescuers have a reasonable idea of the symptoms and if they suspect that a bird is ill will ring the **DEFRA** help line on **08459 335577** rather than bring the bird in and risk contaminating the site. We cannot take the chance of infecting already sick birds. As many of you will know the majority of mute swans in the Thames Valley and surrounding areas are non-migratory and in any case the migration path is away from the UK at this time of the year. The pens and ponds at Cuckoo Weir are covered so it is unlikely that a bird any larger than a magpie could get in. We are also upgrading the treatment room as our vet will do more treatment at Cuckoo Weir to avoid moving birds more than necessary.

Many thanks to all of you who have already renewed their subscriptions, and also to those who responded to the **raffle**. There is still time to return raffle ticket counterfoils, or even sell more tickets. Counterfoils should be sent to Kay. If you are sending a subscription, too, that is fine. Just make it clear, so our treasurer **June** has accurate information for the accounts. Thanks also to supporter **Phil Harley**, whose help with the database means I should now be able to identify those of you who cannot or do not wish to sell raffle tickets, and thus avoid sending them in the future – that said I am only human and may make mistakes!

The audited accounts for the year ending 30th November 2004 are now available – if you would like a copy please send an A4 stamped addressed envelope to **Ian Murray** or alternatively you can look at the main details on the Charity Commission website.

Forthcoming Events

Only one confirmed so far :-
Eton Action Fair 23rd September

As many of you will know we are always in need of help from volunteers, particularly on a Sunday. We usually have some Community Service workers to do the heavy jobs but need people to manage them and man the phones. As Sunday is a day when people are often out and about by the river, this is when swans in trouble are spotted. Many of the rescuers are available on Sunday, but someone needs to co-ordinate the call-outs and see to the admission if the bird is brought in. **Wendy** works a very long day during the week and likes to have the opportunity to see her husband **Steve** and son **Josh** whilst they are at home weekends.

Among recent individual fundraising efforts were a stall at Burnham Fete run by **Val Barker**, re-cycling aluminium cans by **Dave & Lesley Cooke & Jim Lynn**, and a stall at Windsor Christmas market by **Pat & Mike Weller**. Each of these raised just under £100 – very welcome funds. Let's hope some of you are inspired by these efforts.

Former volunteer **Michelle Arnold** is in her final year of a degree in Information Technology at Thames Valley University. As a project she has redesigned the Swan Lifeline website and it is now looking great. We are developing some new ideas for it, and hope to make it more interactive in future. If you can, do take a look.

On the subject of technology, you may notice that the new contact form has a space for an e-mail address. If you are happy to be contacted – or even receive the newsletter - this way, let us know, Send e-mail details to me at: elizabethkay@webb7927.freeserve.co.uk You can be sure that we will keep this and all other personal information secure, and not pass your details on to anyone else.



Registered Charity No: 299254

Val Jeffries, who has helped at Cuckoo Weir for many years, is 'retiring' to look after her granddaughter – I wonder which she will find hardest work! We thank Val for her help and support and are absolutely delighted to hear that she will continue to make her jams, marmalades and chutneys for sale at the centre, on stalls and particularly at the Open day.

Some of you may have seen the latest version of 'Three Men in a Boat' which included a cameo appearance of **Diana Davies** talking to **Dara O'Briain**, Diana was just about to release a cygnet when the film crew spotted her carrying it in a bag. It was great publicity with a full shot of Diana in a Swan Lifeline tee shirt, as well as the cygnet! [Diana once again gave us a donation from the proceeds of the Nativity display in her window.]

COLLECTING BOXES

Collecting boxes can be a surprisingly good form of income for the Charity. In fact one of our local fundraisers managed to raise over £550 last year by coordinating the placing and emptying of 6 boxes in her parish. If you feel that there may be businesses or clubs in your area who would be happy to help in this way, please get in touch with **Mike Weller** on **01628 524123** who has all the information and a plentiful supply of the little red boxes!

Swan News

Cuckoo Weir has been busy as usual – in one period of three weeks we had over forty admissions. We are constantly moving the swans out, provided that the weather is not too cold and the bird has regained its feathering, weight or has been cured of the problem that caused its admission. Birds will have a better chance of surviving any infection from natural immunity gained in the wild than in comparatively close proximity at CWI.

Some jottings from a rescuers log

Settled down to watch TV 8.45pm – phone rang - surely not? Yes! It was Wendy. "Could you go urgently to the Oracle Centre in Reading?" A security guard had rung to say there was a swan with a broken wing standing in the Holy Brook looking miserable. Security said they would provide a ladder - sounds ominous! When my husband **Don** and I arrived, there was the swan on the far side, 12ft down, with a 4ft railing to climb over first. We hoisted

the ladder into position and I hopped over and down - swan hook discreetly hidden. The swan, of course, instantly came to life and trailing its broken wing shot down a dark, gloomy-looking tunnel. The water was only knee deep but the tunnel, although wide, was only 4ft high. I managed to follow for about 100 yards, doubled over, hair sweeping cobwebs and goodness knows what else from the roof – the swan always about 5ft from the end of my hook. The security chap had a powerful lamp which he shone unerringly into my eyes from the far end of the tunnel. I couldn't keep up with the swan as the water got deeper - but I did 'rescue' a nearly new skateboard. Security was well pleased! As I staggered back up the ladder Don said "aren't those your best shoes?" Ah! forgot to change them! I assured security the swan would be back and sure enough the next morning Wendy rang to say it was in the same place. We agreed it was a two hander to cut off escape routes. We set up and unloaded an impressive amount of gear, including two pairs of chest waders. That was when Wendy discovered that her dogs had eaten the knees out of one pair – never mind I did have my wellies this time. We peered over the railings to make a plan of action – the swan looked up, saw us and was on the move – there was a tunnel in each direction and he was heading for the nearest. Wendy was over the railings and down previously unnoticed escape rings to head him off. I raced back for our hooks, yelled at two workmen who were working from a ladder to let me get down at top speed into the Brook. I threw Wendy her hook and with a pincer action we soon had the swan. Getting up the vertical ladder with a 10kg swan - from me - to you etc was quite entertaining for the watching shoppers, but we did get a round of applause! Once we had the swan settled I noticed a pair of wellies standing forlornly by themselves – good grief! My second best pair of shoes were now also a size too large.

A week later I had another rescue in Reading – a dehydrated swan trapped in a shallow stream near the lock. It had been there a week. The banks were very steep crumbling earth, although the water was only 6ins deep. I put my wellies on and had to find a place where I could slide down on my backside – into a knee deep pool of course! I picked the swan up easily and, wrapped and bagged, I handed



Registered Charity No: 299254

her up to the lady who had reported it. Getting out of the brook was not so easy though. I now had about 4 litres of water in each boot and couldn't lift my legs up. I couldn't remove them because of suction - I was stuck! It took a good quarter of an hour and a lot of hawthorn thorns in my hands before I clawed my way out, muddy and bedraggled. I now favour a pair of tight fitting shoes and a long knotted rope to climb up as part of my rescue gear.

Diana Davies

[Most rescuers have a 'kit' at the ready - this will usually include the hook, a wrap, ties and shopping trolley bag, to protect the interior of their vehicle. Many also have scissors, pliers and forceps to deal with some incidents on site. Unbelievable but true is that swans can and do sometimes recognize rescuers. A point to note is that invariably a swan that has once been caught with a hook will rapidly swim off in another direction as soon as it spots one. I have experienced both having my wellies stuck fast in mud, on a dark evening on D'Oyly Carte Island – fortunately I was not alone and handed the cygnet to someone else whilst I struggled. And also on what is now a legendary rescue at Seven Islands pond on Mitcham Common with Tim, I had my waders fill with water making it almost impossible to move. That was the first evening – the second evening I wore canvas shoes and just got extremely wet but eliminated the danger of sinking– **Kay**]

And Finally . . .

I had a call from SLL recently to attend an incident in Marlow where a swan was in a shop. Aware of the occasional warped sense of humour of some volunteers at Cuckoo Weir, I thought the call at 4pm on a Friday afternoon was a hoax. It took a full 5 minutes for the caller to convince me that it was genuine! So, duly convinced, I sped off and knocked on the locked door of **Whittards of Chelsea** specialist tea and coffee shop in the middle of the busy High Street. The door was opened and inside on the polished wood floor was an adult pen calmly eating surrounded by the staff. By this time quite a crowd had collected on the pavement outside wondering why the shop had been closed for the past half hour or so. I collected the bird and departed, giving a quick practical lesson to the very inquisitive throng on the way. The shop manager said that he didn't

mind closing and losing potential custom as he took a keen interest in wildlife and wanted to help.

How did the bird get there? This is a bit of a mystery. The shop staff first noticed it on the pavement when it was apparently frightened by a dog and made towards the road. They guided it into the shop for safety. The Thames at the closest point is some 300 metres away so it would have been quite a long walk right in the town centre and over at least one busy road. Perhaps it flew in as it fancied a cuppa!

Mike Weller

We are sorry to report the death of **Mrs Marj Unwin of the Outwood Swan Sanctuary**. In the early eighties Marj helped Steve & Zyllah Cooke of Save Our Swans by looking after both very young cygnets and some of the long term injured birds. Marj also cared for some Swan Lifeline birds when we had very restricted space at private premises in Windsor. Her husband Ted, to whom the hospital unit is dedicated, assisted with the initial layout of Cuckoo Weir when Eton College offered us the site.

Edited by:-

Kay Webb

1 Markway House ,Lower Hampton Road
Sunbury on Thames 'TW16 5PN

Tel. 01932 761176

elizabethkay@webb7927.freeseerve.co.uk

www.swanlifeline.com