

# THE SWANS – AND CYGNETS – OF FIGGATE PARK



(Photograph taken by Maureen Brogan on 13 May)

In ‘*Laudato Si*’, Pope Francis quoted the Japanese Bishops’ Conference:  
**“To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope”**

*Many of our Parish Facebook Page followers seem to have enjoyed the photos and videos taken by Fr Jock and Deacon Eddie in Figgate Park (and of their cousins at Dunsapie Loch by Arthur’s Seat and the Esk In Musselburgh) in the last seven weeks. Recently Deacon Eddie wrote to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust about his sighting of the Mum’s ring number, and received this reply:*

Dear Mr White,

Your sighting of Mute Swan HDH has been forwarded to me by the WWT as the ringer of this bird. Apologies for the lateness in responding but the Coronavirus epidemic resulted in delays in the WWT being able to respond to queries.

HDH lime/pale green (metal ring W35109) was ringed as an adult female at Figgate Pond on 5th October 2002 so is now probably at least 20 years old. She has bred at Figgate every year since 2003 and is now with her third mate. In 17 breeding seasons from 2003 to 2019 she has fledged a total of 66 young including 33 since 2013 with her current partner NIU.

Thank you for sending in your sighting and I attach an Information leaflet on our study for your interest. Any further observations will be very welcome.

Regards - Allan Brown - Lothians & Fife Swan and Goose Study Group

Mr Brown also attached a leaflet about swans put together  
by the **Lothians and Fife Swan and Goose Study Group in 2012:**

**Introduction** - The Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* is found across the Palearctic in an area extending from North and central Europe to central Asia with a population of over 500,000 birds. It is regarded as native in Britain where the population numbers around 74,000 birds. Mute Swans have been introduced to many countries throughout the world. The European population has increased and expanded in its range since the 1970s.

**History** - Mute Swans were present in Britain and widespread in England prior to 1250. They were highly valued as a source of food, down and feathers and consequently during the mediaeval period the population was reduced to a semi-captive state in Britain and it is only in the last hundred years or so that the British population has returned to the wild state. The species has never been a "royal" bird in Scotland. The Scots Parliament passed an Act in 1551 to fix the price of swans at five shillings each. There are records of breeding at Kilconquhar Loch, Fife, in 1629, of their presence on Linlithgow Loch around 1650 and of an introduction to Duddingston Loch in 1678. A national census in 2002 recorded the highest ever total of Mute Swans in Scotland - 7028 birds, including 1012 breeding pairs - representing 22% of the British population.

**Reasons for the study** - Concerns were expressed by ornithologists in the Lothians in 1976 regarding an apparent decline in the number of Mute Swans in the area and the population was surveyed in 1977. Annual censuses have been carried out since 1978.

**Ringling** - The commencement of a colour ringling scheme in 1982 enabled aspects of population dynamics such as post-fledging survival, mortality and movements to be examined. The ringling is undertaken by qualified ringlers licensed through the British Trust for Ornithology. Each swan is fitted with a uniquely numbered metal ring and a larger coloured plastic ring which enables individual swans to be identified without the need for recapture. Prior to 1994 white rings with three numbers or letters were used but since 1995 pale green rings with three black letters have been utilised and more recently dark green rings with three white letters. Over 5,000 birds, including 3,000 cygnets, have been ringled since 1982.

**Population trend** - In the Lothians the territorial population increased from only 20 pairs in 1978 to around 100 pairs between 2002 to 2006 but has since declined to 78 pairs in 2010. During the same period the total population increased from 117 birds in 1978 to a peak of 619 in 2005 before declining to 391 birds in 2010.

**Some findings from ringling –**

1. Many established pairs remain at their breeding site even if unsuccessful.
2. A number of pairs have remained together for over 10 years.
3. One third of cygnets do not survive their first year and only a third of these attain breeding age (at 3-4 years) and only a small percentage of these actually breed.
4. Most fledged cygnets join local flocks but a few move considerable distances with birds seen as far north as Aberdeenshire, south into Durham and North Yorkshire and west as far as Ayrshire.
5. Most birds do not live beyond 12 years of age but a small number have lived to 20 years old.
6. Over 100 territorial sites have been occupied in both Lothians and Fife but not all are used every year.

**Additional Assistance**

Many people have contributed to this project but additional help or details of ringed swan sightings are always welcome. The cooperation of landowners, local authorities and national agencies has been invaluable and much appreciated.