



Guidance on Action to be Taken in the Event of Waterfowl, particularly Mute Swans becoming snared or entangled in fishing line.

In the event of a swan becoming snared or tangled in fishing line, it is vital to remain calm; the watchword in dealing with what can become a very difficult situation, is to remain calm and rational.

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1. Introduction.

Broadly speaking, problems are likely to belong in one of only two categories:

1. Line, with or without a hook, weights or float, has become wrapped around some part or parts of the bird's anatomy; neck, body, wings or legs, or a combination of any of these. If the bird has any reason to panic, the problem can, very quickly become more serious, especially as the line will have a tendency to tighten.
2. A potentially far more serious problem occurs when a bird swallows a line, more often than not, with a hook on the end. **Under no circumstances must the line be pulled**, because the resulting injury can be dealt with only with major surgery, followed by lengthy rehabilitation. **In this situation, expert help must be sought.**

2. Catching Swans.

If in any doubt at all, because of the 'lay of the land' – high, steep banks, deep, fast flowing water, inadequate ease of approach to the waters edge, simply do not attempt it; **call for help.**

By virtue of their size, the idea of catching a swan can appear daunting, but generally is much easier than catching a goose or even a duck. On waters where swans are used to people, and being fed by people, the technique is simple, provided it is understood **body language is important.** It can be obvious to a bird there is an intention to catch it, so, be relaxed as if the last thing in mind is a capture. So, gain the trust of the bird by a controlled supply of food – brown bread is good – and gently encourage it to come close enough to take by the neck and, as quickly as possible gain control by folding the arms around the body, and, in so doing ensure the wings are folded in naturally against the body.

With reference to food, an alternative tactic which can work well is to use mixed (poultry) corn. When offered to birds on the water, a high proportion of it sinks. The rescue can then be carried out when the bird has its head under water

Unfortunately, situations do arise in which the bird in need of help is not, or cannot be tempted by food. Sometimes, time and patience solve this problem, but if not, a boat assisted rescue may be necessary. If this is the case, this may be the time to call for help; it would be totally wrong to employ a noisy high-speed boat and chase the bird to exhaustion. Once again, stealth and subterfuge are more likely to result in a successful outcome. It is for this reason, the use of experienced boat people using kayaks is especially recommended. The number needed really depends on the nature of the environment, but essentially the technique is to deploy the boats in a way which is analogous to the way a shepherd uses his dogs. The idea is either to bring the bird near enough for a member of the bank or shore party to catch the swan, or to drive it into e.g. dense vegetation, so drastically reducing its speed and manoeuvrability allowing a capture to be made. **However, if in doubt, seek help.**

3. Dealing with 'Tackled' Swans.

Once the swan has been caught and brought under control, i.e. with its wings folded in close to the body in as natural a 'pose' as possible, it is usual for the bird to become reasonably passive. In general, swans do not bite; experience tends to suggest a swan which is biting could be in pain. It is worth remembering the act of catching a bird – in addition to any other problems it may have – will have been a shock, and so, to a lesser or greater extent, the bird may be traumatised. Consequently, it is important the handling of the bird which now follows needs to be done calmly and firmly, **but not roughly.** An extra pair of hands may be helpful – the one thought in the bird's mind will be to escape; wild animals have no concept that the whole purpose of the exercise is to provide help.

Turning to the question of fishing line, the first and most important point to stress is that ...

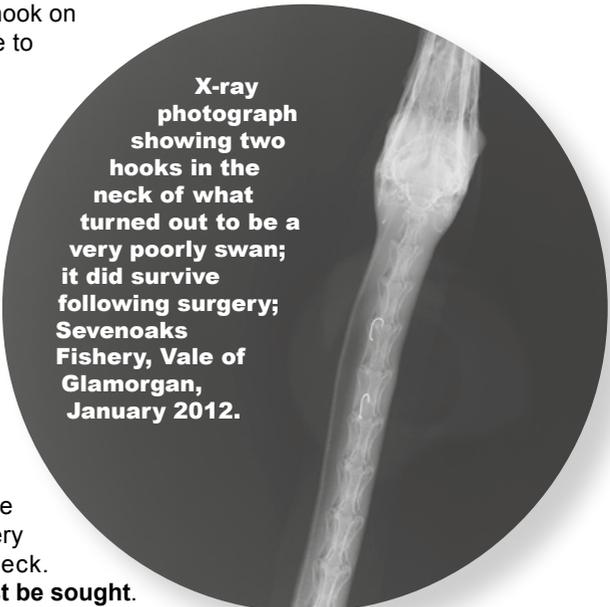
...under no circumstances should a line which has been swallowed or ingested be pulled.

There may, or may not be hook on the end of it; it is impossible to be absolutely sure. If there is a hook on the line, the result of applying tension to it will, in all probability result in a tear to the oesophagus. Resolving this problem will require major surgery which is only for the real experienced experts.

A septic infection develops rapidly at the site of a torn oesophagus.

Evidence that this stage has already been reached is provided by the existence of swelling – sometimes very obvious – in the swan's neck.

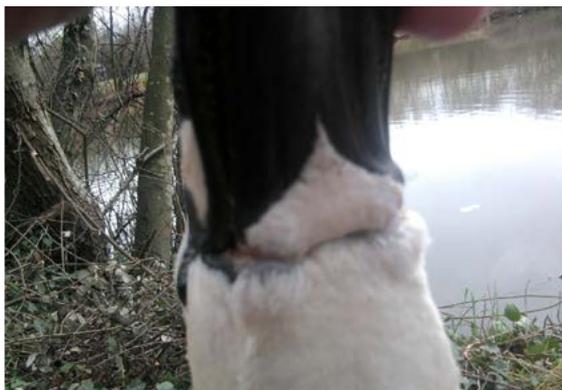
If this is the case, **help must be sought.**



X-ray photograph showing two hooks in the neck of what turned out to be a very poorly swan; it did survive following surgery; Sevenoaks Fishery, Vale of Glamorgan, January 2012.

If, immediately prior to rescue, the bird was feeding well, the trailing line should be cut as close to the beak as possible.

The most pernicious form to be found in tackled swans is the CHINSTRAP. This can be very difficult to spot from the bank, but swans affected by this problem have great difficulty eating, and may also exhibit a lump in the neck. **Chinstrap** is the name given to the phenomenon in which line has been ingested in such a way that it passes under the rear of beak, and one end passes down each side of the tongue. The consequence of way the digestive system works is that the line simply becomes tighter and tighter, and has the potential to sever the lower half of the bill.



Example of severe chinstrap in a two year old bird at Brinsham Park, Yate, South Gloucestershire, March, 2013.

The example of a chinstrap shown in the photograph is a particularly severe one which was known about long before the bird was caught; it is often the case, especially with young birds – cygnets – the problem is difficult to see. The solution is to run a finger nail under the beak, and if a line is present, the nail will catch on it. **Beware!** There may be more than one strand of line. The next step is very simple – with a pair of scissors, cut the line, and the tension in the line will be released immediately.

Provided there are no other problems apparent, the bird can then be put back on the water. The one proviso attached to this is that the bird should be monitored to check it is behaving normally – feeding, preening, associating with other members of the flock (if there is one), etc. In particular, pay particular attention to the neck. If a swelling appears, it will be necessary to catch the bird again, **and to seek assistance**.

Checking for the presence of a chinstrap should in any case be part of the routine procedure for any swan which has been rescued.



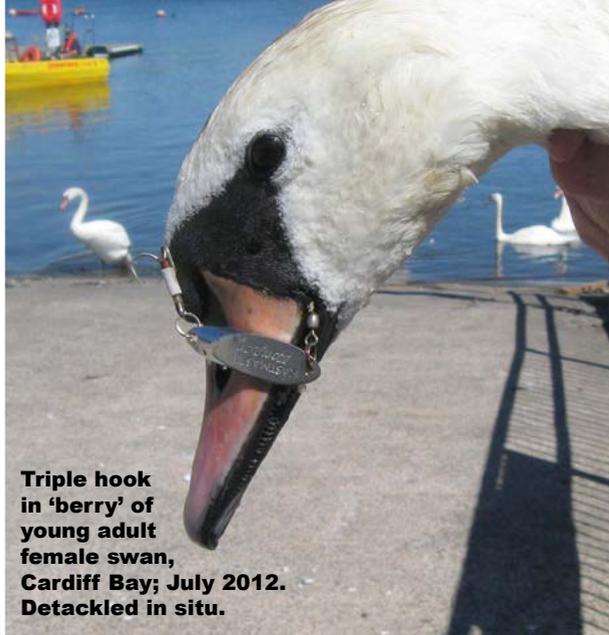
Above: The obvious swelling in the neck of this cygnet is caused by infection and leakage of food from a tear in the oesophagus caused by tension applied to a line with a hook on the end ingested by the bird. Surgery under a general anaesthetic is necessary to repair this damage, followed by lengthy rehab. which in the early days will include on-going treatment with antibiotics. Mathern Mill, Monmouthshire, September, 2011.

Birds which have line wrapped around their bodies, (necks, wings and/or legs) are potentially much easier to deal with, provided a calm and methodical approach is adopted. It is simply a case of finding a loose end of the line, and disentangling it length by length. It should be remembered, if the swan has been 'carrying' the line for any length of time, it may have struggled to free itself and made the entanglement worse than it was initially. The task of disentangling must be carried out thoroughly and with patience. This is particularly important because the bird may also be carrying one or more hooks. Barbless or micro-barbed hooks are relatively easy to remove.

Below: Tangle of line around neck of adult swan; Fendrod Lake, Swansea, August 2011. Detackled in situ.



The same is definitely not true of multi-pronged hooks attached to lures. It can be that the only solution in this case is, very carefully, to use a pair of cutters and so remove the hook in two pieces, taking care to ensure all the bits are retained for safe disposal. In the majority of cases, it is probable, once a final check has been carried out, to ensure **all the line has been removed**, the bird can then be returned to the water.



Triple hook in 'berry' of young adult female swan, Cardiff Bay; July 2012. Detackled in situ.

However, from time to time, situations occur, in which for example, a line is wound tightly around a leg (often many times), and it has cut deeply into the flesh. It has to be a matter of judgement for the individual, but removing line like this can be extremely difficult, and on balance it is probably better to **seek expert help**; a vet, who has at his



Hook in tongue of cygnet; Eastville Park Lake, Bristol; November 2013. Detackled in situ.

disposal the necessary combination of good light, magnifying glasses, appropriate cutters and tweezers, and if necessary, antiseptic washes and dressings.

4. Sources of Help and Advice.

There are relatively few active rescue groups dedicated to the rescue of distressed or injured swans (and other waterfowl). The extent to which each feels able to turn out to carry out a rescue is, as might be expected, dependent upon the distance involved, and the resources available. Rescue groups tend to be small groups of volunteers which, in the main, are self-funded. Nevertheless, the following list of contacts should provide the basis for finding a solution to all but the most intractable problems.

1. National Swan Sanctuary - 01932 240790 - Shepperton, Surrey.
Covers the Home Counties and London. Also holds a list of contacts in other parts of England and Wales.
2. Swan Rescue South Wales - 01633 895241 - 07802 472788 -
Newport, South Wales.
Covers South and Mid Wales, Herefordshire, south Gloucestershire, Bristol, Bath and north Somerset, but has been known to go further afield.
3. Secret World of Nature - 01278 783250 - Highbridge, Somerset.
Covers Somerset, North Devon and Bristol area.
4. Cuan Wildlife Rescue - 01952 728070 - Much Wenlock, Shropshire.
Covers Shropshire, Staffordshire, north Herefordshire and local parts of Welsh borders.
5. Wychbold Swan Rescue - 07786 434793 - Droitwich, Worcestershire.
Covers Worcestershire, West Midlands, south and west Birmingham and the Black Country.
6. Tinkers Hill - 01834 814397 - 07771 507915 - Amroth, Pembrokeshire.
Covers Pembrokeshire and adjacent parts of West Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire.

National Swan Convention;
PNM/ET V1. 11.2013.

