



Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

This overview provides information about the black swan, a species identified as a priority for H5 bird flu preparedness and response in Western Australia.

About the species

Black swans are a large, iconic native waterbird found across most of Australia, including throughout much of Western Australia. They are most common in the south-west of the state, where they occur on wetlands, estuaries, rivers, lakes and sheltered coastal waters.

Black swans are primarily herbivorous and feed on aquatic vegetation including algae, seagrasses and other wetland plants. They are highly mobile and may travel long distances in response to changing rainfall, water levels and food availability.

Black swans breed on freshwater, brackish and saline wetlands, building large nests from reeds and other vegetation in shallow water. Both parents share incubation and care of cygnets. After breeding, adult swans undergo an annual moult and are unable to fly for around a month, during which they may gather in large numbers at suitable wetlands.

Conservation status and H5 bird flu risk

EPBC Act status (Cth)	Not listed
BC Act status (WA)	Not listed
IUCN Red list status	Least Concern
WA H5 Bird flu risk rating	High

EPBC Act = Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth); BC Act = Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016 (WA).

Why is this species a priority?

Black swans are one of Western Australia's most recognisable and iconic bird species and are the official bird emblem of Western Australia. They are highly valued

by the community and hold significant cultural, ecological and public interest value.

Although they are not listed as threatened and are considered Least Concern globally, black swans have been identified as having a high risk of impacts from H5 bird flu in Western Australia.

Why might black swans be vulnerable to H5 bird flu?

Research suggests black swans may be particularly vulnerable because they appear to have a reduced ability to fight H5 bird flu infection compared to some other swan and waterfowl species. Significant mortality has been recorded in black swan populations overseas.

Black swans belong to a group of birds that commonly carry avian influenza viruses and often occur in close association with ducks, geese, migratory shorebirds and other waterbirds. They also gather in large numbers at wetlands, estuaries and other important waterbird habitats where many species mix together.

Black swans breed in pairs or loose colonies and may congregate during moulting and at important feeding and breeding sites. These behaviours, together with their high susceptibility to disease, may increase opportunities for H5 bird flu introduction and spread.

For some populations, impacts from H5 bird flu may occur alongside other pressures affecting habitat condition, breeding success and population health.



AVOID



RECORD



REPORT 1800 675 888

Current conservation and management actions

Black swans are supported through a range of conservation and management activities at selected wetlands and other important sites. These include:

- management of water levels at important wetlands, including Thomsons Lake, Lake Mealup, Lake McLarty and the Vasse-Wonnerup wetland system, to support breeding habitat and wetland health
- rescue and relocation of cygnets from drying wetlands, including at sites such as Forrestdale Lake
- fox control at key breeding sites to improve nesting success and cygnet survival
- habitat restoration and wetland management, including weed control and revegetation
- management of visitor access and disturbance at important wetland sites through signage, fencing and designated paths and lookouts.

What response actions may be implemented?

If H5 bird flu is detected in areas inhabited by black swans, response actions may be implemented based on a risk assessment of the situation.

Actions may include:

- temporary restrictions on public access or activities involving wildlife to minimise biosecurity risks, reduce disturbance to wildlife and support response activities
- removal and disposal of wildlife carcasses where required
- additional biosecurity measures, including cleaning and disinfection of footwear and equipment
- increased surveillance and monitoring of birds and other wildlife
- investigation of reports of sick or dead wildlife, including collecting samples where required
- supporting the welfare and protection of affected wildlife
- providing information and updates to increase awareness.

What additional actions may help black swans?

A range of actions may help reduce disease impacts and improve the resilience of black swan populations. Supporting healthy populations, reducing disturbance and addressing key threats may support black swans to better withstand and recover from H5 bird flu outbreaks.

Actions may include:

- expanding habitat restoration programs to improve the availability of food, shelter and nesting sites
- maintaining water levels at additional wetlands during dry periods
- additional fox control at significant breeding sites
- monitoring populations and disease occurrence
- expanding cygnet monitoring, rescue and relocation at high-risk sites
- considering vaccination opportunities for captive, managed or temporarily held black swans, including during cygnet rescue and relocation programs, where feasible and supported by relevant approvals.

How you can help

AVOID. RECORD. REPORT.

If you see sick or dead wildlife:

- Avoid contact with wildlife and do not touch sick or dead animals.
- Record what you see, including the location and take photographs where safe to do so.
- Report unusual wildlife illness or deaths to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

You can also help black swans by following signs and management advice, avoiding contact with and not feeding black swans or other wildlife, keeping dogs on a lead around wetlands and waterways, reducing disturbance to feeding, nesting and moulting birds, and cleaning footwear and equipment when moving between wildlife areas.

Important: This document describes how authorities may prepare for and respond to H5 bird flu in Western Australia. Response measures will depend on the circumstances and may change over time. Additional measures may be implemented where required to protect wildlife, livestock, people and the environment.

