

PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON  
THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

**A. PROPOSAL:** Listing of the Uruguayan populations of the black-neckedswan *Cygnus melanocorypha* in Appendix I of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)

**B. PROPONENT:** Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay  
Directorate of Renewable Natural Resources, Fauna Division, Cerrito 318, Piso 1º, C.P. 11.000 Montevideo, Uruguay

**C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

**1. Taxonomy**

- 1.1 Aves
- 1.2 Anseriformes
- 1.3 Anatidae
- 1.4 *Cygnus melanocorypha* (Molina 1872)
- 1.5 Spanish: Cisne de cuello negro  
English: Black-necked swan  
French: Cygne à cou noir

**2. Biological data**

2.1 Distribution

The species is endemic in the Southern Cone, where it inhabits southern Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Some individuals disperse to Paraguay. In Uruguay the range consists of the wetlands in the east, in the Departments of Maldonado, Rocha and Treinta y Tres. In times of drought, the "normal" range increases as individuals move to the south-centre and south-west and, in smaller numbers, in the north-west, as far as the Department of Paysandú. Similarly, in prolonged periods of drought at microregional level, the presence of black-necked swans has been recorded at Antarctic latitudes (Artigas Antarctica Base, Southern Shetland Islands; Gambarotta et al 1993).

2.2 Population

It has been calculated on the basis of bibliographic compilations (del Hoyo *et al.*, 1992) that the world population is around 100,000 individuals, with 20,000 in Uruguay, although in fact the latter figure is an overestimate. An aerial census carried out by the Canadian Wildlife Service (R. Morrison *vide* Vaz Ferreira y Rilla 1991), dated 24/01/1986, reported 6,820 individuals. In turn, on 6/10/1987, the Wildlife Division conducted a further aerial census, which arrived at a count of 8,869 individuals. On the basis of these census figures and on-the-spot surveys, it has been estimated that the Uruguayan populations of *Cygnus melanocorypha* number at most some 10,000 individuals (Arballo and Cravino, in press).

2.3 Habitat

In Uruguay the black-necked swan inhabits shallow fresh or brackish waters, marshlands and flooded meadows. In its dispersive movements, it is reported in the waters of estuaries and oceans, continental waterways and artificial lakes - not always shallow.

2.4 Migrations

Owing to the scant research carried out so far, the migratory behaviour of the species cannot be

determined with any certainty. It has been suggested (Del Hoyo et al, op. cit.) that the northern and Malvinas/Falkland populations are relatively sedentary, while those at more southern latitudes migrate northwards in winter. Nevertheless, the national censuses referred to above show that the Uruguayan populations (northern portion of the natural range of the species) are strongly affected by drought conditions. In this connection it is useful to quote historical sources like O.V. Aplin (1894), an English naturalist who visited Uruguay in 1892, who reports sightings of swans in areas west of the central part of the country during a year of drought. In recent years, on the occasion of the 1989 and 1995 droughts, wide flock dispersion was observed, with several hundred individuals being recorded in sites far from the regular range of the species in the country (Arballo and Cravino, in press).

### 3. Threat data

#### 3.1 Direct threats to the population

Hunting is one of the factors adversely affecting the species, especially in those sites at which individuals arrive through irregular dispersions (in cases of drought), tending therefore to attract the attention of the local people.

It has been found in several cases, following official investigations, that swans had been captured to adorn lakes in private residences.

It has likewise been discovered that zoological institutions encourage their capture as they are able to use the swan as one of their main means of "barter".

In some sites, such as as the José Ignacio, Garzón and Rocha lakes, the core swan populations are affected by human activity in the form of nautical sports, in particular windsurfing. The use by swans of lakeside waters, where they usually congregate, is impeded by the presence of human beings in the summer (tourism).

#### 3.2 Habitat destruction

The situation of the swan is the same as that suffered by other species characteristic of the RAMSAR site known as the "Bañados del Este" (Eastern marshlands), where there have been drastic changes in the water regime following the installation of drainage, dikes and canalizations which have affected surface run-off, leading to prolonged draining or to overflowing.

#### 3.3 Indirect threats

The use of agricultural pesticides, particularly in the wetlands, where toxins are most easily spread, has not been studied with particular reference to its effect on swans.

#### 3.4 Threats related to migrations

Although the migratory patterns of the species are not known with certainty, it is an established fact that long-distance movements regularly occur in times of drought. In such cases, the individuals involved are usually worse off, having to occupy artificial lakes. In these environments, whether through excessive eutrophication or through a lack of nutrients specific to deep ponds and reservoirs, the swans do not manage to get back their strength. Because then of the accessibility of the swans, poaching increases considerably at such times. Dispersive movements also generally bring the swans to the estuarine waters of Río de la Plata, where the species does not find appropriate food. The size of the Uruguayan populations usually decreases sharply at such times. During the 1989 drought it was estimated that the population had dropped to under 2,000 individuals (Fauna Division, unpubl. data), i.e. to under 20 per cent of the normal level.

#### 4. Protection status and needs

##### 4.1 National protection status

*Cygnus melanocorypha* is a fully protected species under Uruguayan law, it being prohibited to hunt or capture it and to remove its broods.

There are difficulties affecting the conservation of the species in protected areas. The "Bañados del Este" RAMSAR site is currently under review with the aim, in particular, of incorporating areas of ornithological value, like Laguna de Rocha, which is the main site where swans congregate, usually accounting for more than 50 per cent of the national population.

##### 4.2 International protection status

The species is listed in Appendix II of the International Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

##### 4.3 Additional protection needs

It is considered necessary to conclude agreements within the framework of the Bonn Convention (Article 4) among the Range States of the species. Particular objectives should include the undertaking of a regional programme of census-taking and research on the movements of the species, based on a standardized methodology for capture, tagging, monitoring and exchange of information.

At national level, there is a need for the promulgation of a Protected Areas Act, currently under discussion in parliament, which would serve to improve the level of protection of the species, on the basis of increased availability of economic resources. Indirectly, greater protection of the species and its environments could be achieved through educational campaigns directed at those who set particular store by the beauty and symbolic value of the swan.

#### 5. Range States

- R Area of residence, with little breeding
- B Breeding area
- DM Area of dispersive movements
- W Wintering area
- V Vagrant or occasional presence

- 5.1 Chile: R, B, DM, W
- 5.2 Argentina: R, B, DM, W
- 5.3 Uruguay: R, DM, W
- 5.4 Paraguay: V
- 5.5 Brazil: R, DM, W
- 5.6 Antarctica: V, DM

#### 6. Comments from Range States

The situation of the species in southern Brazil is comparable to that in Uruguay (J.O. Menegheti, Universidad de Río Grande do Sul, pers. com.).

Chile subscribes to the approach set out in the present proposal (R. Schlatter, pers. com.).

In Argentina there are no precise data regarding the population levels of the species. The specialists consulted agree that it is necessary to implement regional agreements on conservation and research

(V. Litschein, Dirección Nacional de Flora y Fauna Silvestres; M.E. Zaccagnini, INTA Sub-Programa de Fauna Silvestre).

#### 7. Additional remarks

#### 8. References

- Aplin, O.V. (1894) *On the birds of Uruguay*. The Ibis, ser. VI, vol. VI: 149-215
- Arballo, E. & J. Cravino (in press) *Aves del Uruguay, Manual Ornitológico*. Editorial Hemisferio Sur, Montevideo.
- Gambarotta J; Fontana N. & J. Cravino (1993) *Observaciones ornitológicas en Península Fildes, Isla Rey Jorge (Shetland del Sur)*. Revista del Instituto Antártico Uruguayo, vol. 4: 121-126.
- Vaz Ferreira, R. & F. Rilla (1991) Black-necked Swan *Cygnus melancoryphus* and Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*, in wetlands in Uruguay. Wildfowl, Supplement N° 1: 272-277.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliot, A. & Sargatal, J. eds. (1992) *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol 1. Lynx Editions, Barcelona