

Professor Newton, writing to me in July 1859, says, "I have been at the swannery at Abbotsbury—a very fine sight. There were upwards of eight hundred at the last counting." The royalty belonged anciently to the abbot, since to the family of Strangeways, and now to the Earl of Ilchester.

On the Thames and other rivers, great lakes, and ponds the Mute Swan commences its nest in March; and by the middle of April the six or seven olive-white eggs are incubated. During this period the male is in constant attendance upon the female, occasionally taking her place upon the eggs, or guarding her with jealous care, giving chase and battle, if necessary, to every intruder. The nest is often placed in an exposed situation, on an island in preference to the river's bank, is of large size, and constructed of herbage of various kinds, such as weeds, flags, &c. sparingly lined with the soft feathers of the parent birds. If there be any unusual rise in the water, the female raises her eggs out of harm's way by adding fresh materials to the nest. In a month or thereabouts the cygnets are hatched and taken to the water, where they usually swim on the lee side of the mother, and at this early period possess all the energies necessary for the continuance of their existence, swimming quickly, and feeding upon the tender succulent plants which are pulled from the bottom by their parents. These downy cygnets, being extremely pretty and even graceful, are the admiration of all who see them. If they become fatigued, they scramble on the back of the mother and nestle among the secondary feathers, by which means they obtain both warmth and shelter—a practice which is continued for two or three weeks. Their colour at this time is a light bluish grey, with black beak and legs, a dress which is carried for about a month, when a change begins to appear, and by the end of October they are clothed in whitey-brown feathers—a costume which is borne until the second year, when these feathers are gradually shed and white ones take their place; but the perfect plumage and the rich orange-colouring of the bill are not attained until the commencement of the third year.

"The Swan's nest, from its ample dimensions," says Mr. Stevenson, "is always a conspicuous object, whether placed amongst the rank herbage on the river's bank, at the mouth of a marsh-drain, or on the little islands and reedy margins of the broads themselves; and from the summit of that littered mass the sitting bird commands all approaches, whilst her mate keeps guard below. To my mind an old male Swan never looks more beautiful than when, thus 'on duty,' he sails forth from the margin of the stream to meet intruders; with his head and neck thrown back between his snowy pinions, and every feather quivering with excitement, he drives through the rippling water, contenting himself, if unmolested, with a quiet assertion of his rights, but with loud hisses and threatening actions resenting an attack. When the young, too, under the joint convoy of their parents, have taken to the water, the actions of both birds are full of grace and vigour, and the deep call-notes of the old pair mingle with the soft whistlings of their downy nestlings. What prettier sight presents itself upon our inland waters than such a group disporting themselves in the bright sunshine of a summer's day, when the pure whiteness of the old bird's feathers contrasts with the green background of reeds and rushes, and the little grey cygnets on their mother's back are peeping with bright bead-like eyes from the shelter of her spotless plumes? This habit of taking the young on her back is not, as some have supposed, adopted only as a means of safety when crossing a strong current, but is a method of brooding her young on the water, very commonly practised by the female Swan when her cygnets are small; and she will sink herself low in the water that they may mount the more easily. Whether at the same time she gives them a 'leg up' by raising them on the broad webs of her own feet I cannot say positively; but this is not improbable, since a favourite action in Swans is that of swimming with one foot resting upon the lower part of the back, the sole of the foot being uppermost. The down of the nestlings is replaced by feathers of a uniform slate-grey, and though in some a sprinkling of white feathers may be seen in their first autumn, they do not acquire their full plumage till the following summer, when from twelve to fourteen months old. It is, however, in that intermediate stage (the least attractive as regards form or plumage) that they are most in request for edible purposes. Such cygnets as either elude the pursuit of the swanherds in August, or are intentionally left with their parents, are invariably driven away by the old ones, later in the season, to shift for themselves, and congregate in small parties until paired off for nesting. The orange-red colour of the beak is not acquired till the third year, up to which time, though perfectly white in plumage, they are known as 'blue beaks;' and the development of the knob or 'berry' is a matter of age."

Much has been written respecting the harm done by Swans in the destruction of fish in our rivers; but I firmly believe that this occurs to a very limited extent, their natural food being aquatic plants and the grasses of the meadows, and that on the contrary they effect much good by clearing the thick beds of weeds: they may take a little of the spawn of fish during the limited period in which it is deposited; but I believe the perfect fish are seldom molested; and probably their only animal food consists of mollusks and crustaceans when an opportunity occurs for their capture.

Latham states that the *Cygnus olor* is found wild in Russia and Siberia, most plentiful in the latter; and Mr. Dresser informs me he has himself seen it in a wild state on the banks of the Southern Danube, and also on the island of Bornholm, in Denmark, whence he has eggs.

The principal figure is about half the natural size.