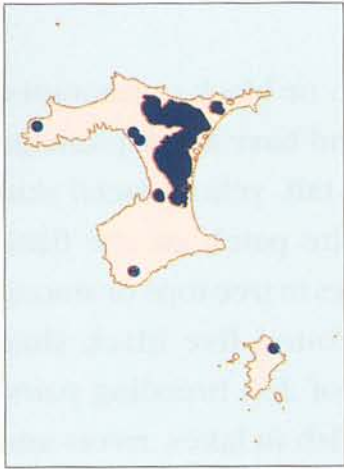


## Black swan *Cygnus atratus*

120 cm

RE-INTRODUCED TO NEW ZEALAND AND CHATHAMS



Black swan family.  
Photo: (DOC).

Black swans are very large, black, long-necked birds, with white wing-tips. The crimson bill has a white bar at the tip. Sexes are alike. Native to Australia and New Zealand, black swans became extinct in New Zealand and the Chatham Islands before European arrival. About 100 black swans were re-introduced to New Zealand during the 1860s; more are thought to have arrived naturally, and they became well



Black swan in flight.  
Photo: John Kendrick  
(DOC).

established throughout New Zealand. Four or five were brought to Chatham Island by Walter Hood in 1890, and others are likely to have flown from New Zealand or Australia. A large

population is now centred on Te Whanga Lagoon, and they are also found on other lakes on Chatham and Pitt Islands. Numbers fluctuate depending on seasonal conditions. In particular, high water levels in the lagoon can restrict birds feeding on the vegetation on the lakebed and cause large die-offs. Estimates have varied from as high as 30,000 in 1953 to around 3000 birds in 1981. Timing of breeding varies in relation to local conditions. Nests are large mounds of grass, usually built within 100 m of a lake. The large pale green eggs are often harvested for food in the Chatham Islands. During the 1950s, it was estimated that up to 40,000 eggs were collected annually.