

Diving behaviour of Shelducks

IN the summers of 1955 to 1958 inclusive, single broods of Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna*) were discovered at Chew Valley Reservoir, Somerset, twelve miles from the coast. Two of the brood found in 1957 were present until they became full-winged and on the many occasions I had them under observation they were always accompanied by their parents. When the young birds were about three-quarters grown and becoming well feathered they were led frequently into some of the deepest water (15-20 ft.) to feed and I then witnessed some interesting feeding and submerging behaviour.

They began by feeding normally on the surface of the water, quickly moving their heads from side to side, but seeking food at greater depths the juveniles gradually submerged and completely disappeared below the surface for periods timed up to fifteen seconds. On the few occasions I was able to discern them below the surface they were still performing the scythe-like movements of their heads.

The adults were never seen acting in a similar manner. That adult Shelducks will dive readily too was well illustrated when D. H. Perrett, D. E. Slocombe and the writer discovered Bridgwater Bay, Somerset, as a moulting ground for the species in 1950. There large 'rafts' of moulting and flightless Shelducks in July and August dived readily if approached too rapidly by boat, having endeavoured to get away by swimming quickly.

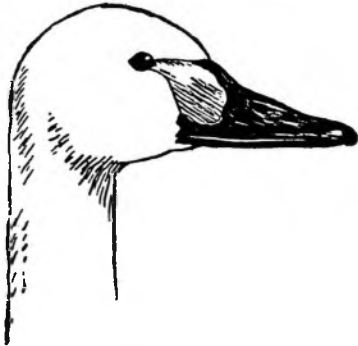
Bernard King.

Large-Billed Bewick's Swans in Somerset

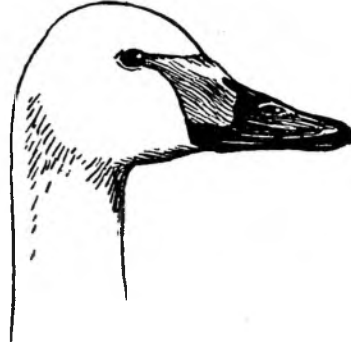
A PARTY of fourteen swans at Durlough Reservoir, Somerset, on 20th February, 1956 included twelve typical Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* and two which, from a distance, appeared to be a little larger and to have decidedly larger bills. I was able to come unseen to within fifty yards of the party, most of them resting on a flat and muddy piece of ground. At this range the two unusual swans still looked larger than the others and their bills seemed not only heavier but had more yellow on them. The yellow areas on the upper mandible were rather truncated in shape and extended up to and just beyond the nostrils. The bills immediately reminded me of the Jankowski's Swan *C.c. jankowskii* in the Wildfowl Trust Collection at Slimbridge. By loudly clapping my hands I was able to induce most of the swans to call, including the two unusual ones. Their voices were similar to those of the remainder, confirming that they were Bewick's rather than Whooper Swans *C.c. cygnus*. Mrs. C. D. Palmer and Miss E. M. Palmer, who were with me, agreed with my field description.

There is still some uncertainty about the validity of the difference between Bewick's Swans breeding in western Siberia (*bewickii*) and those in the far east (*jankowskii*). Delacour (*Waterfowl of the World*, vol. I, 1954) believes that the two are separable, though noting that their ranges overlap in the region of the River Lena. Russian authors on the other hand maintain that some birds taken in the east are indistinguishable from *bewickii*, while some from Novaya Zemlya near the western limit of the range of the species

have bills of the large eastern type. Thus it is not possible to be sure that the two large-billed swans at Durleigh were from an eastern breeding area, but, since such birds are apparently rare in England, it seems desirable to draw attention to their occurrence.



Western Bewick's Swan
Cygnus columbianus bewickii



Eastern Bewick's Swan
Cygnus columbianus jankowskii

It is not thought that the distribution of black on the culmen which varies widely in different individuals has any significance in distinguishing the two races.

February, 1956, was a time at which unusually large numbers of Bewick's Swans (some 3000 individuals) were seen in England and Wales (I.C.T. Nisbet, *British Birds*, vol. 52, pp. 393-416). Nisbet considers that 5% to 10% of the Bewick's Swans that reached Great Britain at that time were misidentified as Whoopers. The difficulty of distinguishing large-billed Bewick's from Whoopers when typical *bewickii* or *cygnus* are not present cannot be ignored, but thorough scrutiny of flocks of Bewick's at close range, when this is possible, should establish whether large-billed birds occur regularly, even if only in very small numbers.

Bernard King.