

FLIGHT OF THE SWANS



A daring flight to uncover the extraordinary journey of one of our most iconic birds...

...uniting people worlds apart in a mission to try to save them

Overview

In autumn 2016, a paramotorist – Sacha Dench – will fly the entire migration route of the Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, from the Pechora Delta of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Arctic Russia to Slimbridge in the UK.

The Bewick's swan breeds in Arctic Russia and migrates each year to winter in northwest Europe. Along that 3500-km journey covering 15 countries, it relies upon a network of wetlands for safe haven and upon support from a wide variety of people.

But the swan faces many threats and its population has declined by 40% since the mid-1990s. The pioneering and record-breaking journey by *Flight of the Swans* will raise awareness of the swans' plight and stimulate support among a wide audience – including local peoples, hunters, farmers, conservation organisations, authorities and decision-makers, and the wider public.

Flight of the Swans will be the stimulus for conservation actions along the flyway:

- national conservation workshops to address key issues for Bewick's swans.
- local wildlife festivals and celebrations at key wetlands, Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) and Wetland Centres along the flyway to engage local communities.
- international public support for conservation initiatives about Bewick's swans and wetlands.



The expedition

Flying in a paramotor – suspended from a parachute wing with a small engine and propeller strapped to her back – Sacha will face the same challenges as the swans. She will fly at the same speed and height as the swans and will battle the same weather and other difficulties along the route.

Sacha will fly through 11 countries where she will visit important landscapes, meeting with local peoples and communities – from farmers, hunters, reindeer herders and schools, to the public who will attend local festivals at wetland sites and Visitor Centres.

She will be accompanied on some sections of the journey by other paramotorists, and a ground crew will follow the expedition to provide support and to share and spread the news of the expedition's progress. Sacha will carry a satellite tag, so that the public can follow her progress online and that of swans we have already fitted with tags.

The expedition will capture the story of the swans' migration but also of the landscapes and the people along the way. We will photograph and film the amazing landscapes, sites and communities along the route, and share this through websites and national media (led by the expedition partners in each country) to build that support. We will highlight the importance of wetlands, of the many stakeholders along the route, their interaction with the swans and their environment, and their role in conserving and ensuring the safety and future of the Bewick's swans.

The expedition will aim to arrive at key sites and Wetland Centres along the route to coincide with festivals and celebrations. The swans' migration and the expedition will be used as central stories in conservation products, including learning materials and an engagement toolkit for the network of Wetland Centres and interested groups along the flyway.

The story of one woman's challenge to complete the journey followed by the Bewick's swans each year will, we hope, reach a far bigger audience than ever before.



How *Flight of the Swans* will interact with the public

- High levels of media coverage will raise awareness of the Bewick's swans, the important habitats that they depend upon and Partner Organisations, to a significantly wider audience.
- Awe-inspiring footage from the unique perspective of the paramotor will provide beautiful and emotive imagery of key migratory sites in a variety of important wetland landscapes. Video and data from satellite trackers will help build an exciting and immersive on-line experience that will engage with the journey in real-time. This imagery will also be available for Partners to use for their own education/learning programmes.
- A bespoke website will enable the public, schools and others to follow progress of *Flight of the Swans* on video, blog, live map, updates and interaction with swan migration and Sacha. A satellite tag will be attached to the paramotor and the tracks of satellite-tagged swans from research projects will also be incorporated into the site. Images and videos from and of the expedition and blogs will be provided, to convey the awe and wonder of the sites and landscapes, of the feats of the birds, and of the perils and challenges of the migration for the swans and the paramotorist.
- Conservation workshops and awareness-raising activities through community events and the media, will help deliver key actions to return Bewick's swans to favourable conservation status and promote the wetland habitats that they and other migratory birds depend upon.
- As the expedition enters each new country, the focus will be tailored to relevant national and local stories, sites and communities, reflecting the work and priorities of our partners.

Partners

We'd like you to be part of this record-breaking event that will unite nature lovers and grab the attention of millions of people across northern Europe and Russia. We hope that you would lead activities in your area, and in return that *Flight of the Swans* would help meet your needs – whether helping to bring stakeholders together, raising the profile of your site or conservation priorities, and providing an opportunity for considerable media exposure.

What we can offer you

Flight of the Swans will provide:

- An exciting and unusual multiplatform story that will attract the attention of a broad range of people.
- A dedicated media campaign, sustained by inspiring video and photo content from the expedition that we'll also provide to you.
- An engaging online experience, including live tracking of the paramotor and swans that directs your local supporters to your campaigns and issues.
- The chance to use the final film and images about the expedition and the birds, people and wetlands along the way.
- High-quality materials and resources to use at community events and festivals including learning materials and an engagement toolkit.
- New interest and enthusiasm for helping the swans and nature, and optimism about the power of international collaboration.

The flight and associated events will attract significant and sustained publicity nationally and internationally, providing an opportunity to create public support for species conservation and organisations involved in this work.

How you could be involved

As the experts in your region, we hope that you would lead on one or more of the following:

- **Help organise/participate in a community activity** to coincide with the arrival of the expedition in your country. Activities at each site could range in scale and may include:
 - Festivals and events themed around swans, migration and wetlands.
 - Work with schools and local community groups / stakeholders.
 - Media events and activities.
 - Citizen science activities based around recording migratory bird numbers, arrival patterns and behaviour.
- **Help organise/participate in a scientific meeting or conservation workshop** which will aim to improve the conservation of Bewick's swans and wetlands in your country and across the migratory route. An event could include:
 - Sharing latest scientific findings among key stakeholders.
 - Progress updates on conservation action.
 - Developing and planning future conservation action.
 - Forming policy.
- **Suggest messages for our media campaign.** We want this expedition to raise the profile of wildlife conservation across the whole region, but we know that it's most powerful locally if it gives you a platform for your issues. That means we would be grateful for your suggestions for messages in our media campaign and we hope that you or your spokespeople would be willing to speak to the media alongside us.

- **Provide advice and support planning the route.** We are aiming to visit as many places and local communities that are connected to swans and swan and wetlands conservation. What are the sites we should visit and who are the people you want to inspire? We may need help to clarify local issues of permissions, where to land, timings or even simply where to stay overnight.
- **Introduce us to people** connected to Bewick's swans in any way – from those with the power to help conserve them, the people whose lives they touch, and those who will feature in the films we make.
- **Be a *Flight of the Swans* champion!** You could help us tell people about *Flight of the Swans*, and join our social media campaign, to maximise support for the project. We hope partners can invite a celebratory patron to promote the expedition nationally.

We will establish a network of partners involved in *Flight of the Swans*, to connect partners doing similar activities, to share help and advice, and to coordinate along the flyway so that, where possible and useful, there is a common approach and message that helps us maximise the impact and realise the most benefits from this project.



International Project Partners

- **Ramsar:** The global convention on wetlands is keen to promote and support the *Flight of the Swans* activities. 169 countries have signed the convention and designated 2,225 wetlands across the globe as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites).

Ramsar will help to work through its national and regional (European) networks to gain support for the project. They are also able to use their mailing lists, website and social media to get the *Flight of the Swans* messages out more widely. See www.ramsar.org/.

- **African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA):** In 2012, AEWA adopted the International Bewick's Swan Action Plan which aims to reverse the decline of the Northwest European population and return the species to favourable conservation status. The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat will help raise awareness of the expedition through their networks and encourage conservation activities across the flyway. See www.unep-aewa.org/.
- **Wetland Link International (WLI):** WLI is an international support network for Wetland Centres, hosted at WWT, with over 300 wetland centres worldwide and linked to the Ramsar Convention's CEPA (Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness) programme. It acts to connect wetland education centres, share best practice and produce new resources to be used by partners. It also functions through regional networks, in this case along the East Atlantic Flyway. See www.wli.org.uk.



Itinerary and provisional timing

Following initial discussions with partners, we have drafted a provisional itinerary. Please note that this is a developing project and we would very much welcome your further advice on sites that Sacha could visit on her journey. Where possible, and weather depending, Sacha will aim to attend as many events as she can on her way.

Early September 2016

Arctic stakeholder and expedition launch events, Naryan-Mar, Russia

Project partners: Nenetskiy zapovednik, Russian Academy of Sciences and others

- Event to promote Bewick's swan conservation among key stakeholders in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, including regional authorities, hunters, national park/nature workers, oil and gas companies, media and local residents.
- Celebratory banquet commemorating 25 years of Anglo-Russian collaborative studies of Bewick's swans in the region.
- Hunting Stakeholder Workshop to champion sustainable hunting practices and address the illegal shooting of Bewick's swans in the Nenetskiy Autonomous Okrug.

Sacha's departure from Naryan-Mar, Arctic Russia, with full press/media coverage

Mid September 2016

Potential community event at/near Arkhangelsk

Project Partner and venue to be finalised

Late September 2016

Community and school event at Lake Ladoga, Russia

Project partners: Baltic Fund for Nature (BFN)

- Community and school event - activities with local schools and stakeholders at both Lake Ladoga and the Field Study Centre at Olonets.

Please note that timings are provisional at this point. We will work with all partners between now and Spring to agree timings, once we have a complete list of sites and events.

Early October 2016

Conservation workshop and school event at Tartu, Estonia

Project partners: Estonian University of Life Sciences

- Conservation workshop - National Action Plan (NAP) implementation meeting. Estonian stakeholders (hunters, farmers, NGOs, etc) will review activities to date, plan future activities and raise awareness of the swans and the NAP.
- Schools event focussing on the Bewick's swans and their migration at the Environmental Information Centre in Tartu.

Community event at Lake Lubans (Ramsar Site), Latvia

Project partners: Nature Conservation Agency and its regional administrations

- Public event at the visitor centre on the shores of Lake Lubans, the biggest lake in Latvia, including young naturalists and a local paramotor group.

Mid October 2016

School activities in Latvia

Project partners: Nature Conservation Agency and its regional administrations

- National drawing competition in schools across Latvia.

Community activities at Nemunas Delta Regional Park (Ramsar Site), Lithuania

Project partners: Birdlife Lithuania, Baltic Environmental Forum, Lithuanian Nature Research Centre

- Community activities to be finalised.

Mid October 2016

Scientific meeting at Ventė, Lithuania

Project partners: Birdlife Lithuania, Baltic Environmental Forum, Lithuanian Nature Research Centre

- Scientific meeting to address the issues facing Bewick's swans in Lithuania (e.g. eutrophication, inter-specific competition)

Potential educational event at Biebrza National Park, Poland

Project partners: Biebrza National Park

- Educational event to be finalised.

Late October 2016

Potential community events in Schleswig Holstein, Germany, and in Denmark

Project Partners and events to be finalised

Early November 2016

Scientific meeting and community/school event at Lake Lauwersmeer, the Netherlands

Project partners: Staatsbosbeheer (Jaap Kloosterhuis) and Wim Tijssen

- A scientific meeting of experts from WWT and the Netherlands Institute of Ecology to determine key causes of the population decline.
- Talks by the experts to disseminate latest research on swans to the public.
- Activities for local schools with a focus on swans, migration and wetlands.

Community event at Het Zwin Wetland Centre, Belgium

Project partners: Het Zwin Wetland Centre

- Working to hold events at the visitor centre of Het Zwin around migratory birds.

Sacha embarks on a record-breaking cross-channel sea crossing from France to the UK with boat support

Mid November 2016

Stakeholder and media event at WWT London Wetland Centre, UK

- A celebration with expedition supporters and other stakeholders at WWT London Wetland Centre.

17 November 2016

Celebratory event at WWT Slimbridge, UK



The Journey

- The map, the black line shows the route of the expedition. It is only approximate at this stage – there will be many twists and turns to visit important sites, interesting locations and events.
- Yellow pins show important sites for Bewick's Swans (some of these are Ramsar Sites). We hope to visit many of these during the expedition. We hope to add more sites, recommended by partners over the next 1-2 months, to create a more detailed itinerary.
- The red stars indicate the locations where we have planned or provisional events (workshops, meetings, local festivals etc). Again, we hope to add more events by talking to partners over the next 1-2 months.

We want the expedition to interact with as many local events as possible. For maximum effect, the paramotorist would arrive at a site during the scheduled event! The reality of a genuine expedition, however, means that the paramotorist is constrained by the weather just like the swans. In case we are delayed, we are developing options to use at events – for example, live link-ups to the expedition crew for a presentation or Q&A or an expedition vehicle and team members driving to your event. We will work with partners to create as much excitement and spectacle at the events as we can.



Contacts

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