

Occurrence of Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* (Latham, 1790) (Aves Anatidae) in Libya, with notes on origin and status

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ABSTRACT

The Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* (Latham, 1790) (Aves Anatidae) is native to Australasia and is widely kept in captivity outside its natural range. In recent decades, feral and escaped individuals have been increasingly recorded in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Here we report the observation of a Black Swan at Assaraya Alhamra Lake, Tripoli, Libya, on 2 February 2026. This constitutes a rare documented occurrence of the species in the country. The circumstances of the observation, behavior of the bird, and regional context are discussed, with particular attention to the likelihood of captive origin.

KEY WORDS

Black Swan; *Cygnus atratus*; captivity; Tripoli; Libya.

Received 08.02.2026; accepted 01.03.2026; published online 30.03.2026

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Cygnus* Bechstein, 1803 (Aves Anatidae) comprises several large-bodied swans distributed mainly across the Northern Hemisphere, with one notable exception: the Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* (Latham, 1790) which is endemic to Australasia (Kear, 2005). Unlike Palearctic swans, *C. atratus* has no natural migratory route to Africa or the Mediterranean basin.

In Libya, the family Anatidae is represented primarily by ducks and geese, while swans are exceptionally rare. Historical records in the country refer mainly to uncertain or vagrant occurrences of Mute Swan *C. olor* (Gmelin, 1789) and Whooper Swan *C. cygnus* Linnaeus, 1758 while the Black Swan *C. atratus* has not been regarded as part of the Libyan avifauna (Bundy, 1976; Isenmann et al., 2016).

The Black Swan *C. atratus* is native to Australia and Tasmania, inhabiting shallow freshwater and brackish wetlands, lakes, and lagoons (Marchant & Higgins, 1990). The species is largely sedentary, though capable of nomadic movements in response to drought.

Due to its ornamental value, the Black Swan *C. atratus* has been widely introduced into parks, estates, and private collections across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Escaped individuals frequently establish feral and stable populations, notably in western Europe (Snow & Perrins, 1998; Lever, 2005).

The Black Swan *C. atratus* is a protected species, currently classified as Least Concern by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International, 2018).

This paper documents the observation of a

Black Swan in Tripoli (Libya) and evaluates its possible origin.

RESULTS

A single specimen of Black Swan *C. atratus* was observed at Assaraya Alhamra Lake, Tripoli, north-western Libya (32°53'N, 13°11'E), on Monday, 2 February 2026. The bird was swimming freely on the lake and associating loosely with a flock of gulls (*Larus* spp.).

The individual showed the diagnostic features of *C. atratus*, including entirely black plumage, a long curved neck, white flight feathers visible at rest, and a bright red bill with a pale tip (Figs. 1, 2). No leg rings or wing tags were visible. According to local observers, the bird had not been present in the lake prior to this date.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The occurrence of Black Swan *C. atratus* in Libya is almost certainly attributable to escape or release from captivity, as the species has no natural dispersal route to North Africa. Similar records across the Mediterranean region are typically linked to ornamental collections (Lever, 2005; Isenmann et al., 2016). Urban wetlands such as Assaraya Alhamra Lake can act as temporary refuges for escaped waterfowl, particularly when they offer safety from disturbance and a reliable food supply (Etayeb, 2014; Etayeb et al., 2015).

The association of the swan with wild gulls suggests rapid acclimatization to a natural setting but does not imply wild origin.

Unlike Palearctic swans, whose occasional presence in Libya can be explained by extreme weather or displacement during migration, the Black Swan must be treated as an exotic species with no established status in the country.

The observation of a Black Swan *C. atratus* at Assaraya Alhamra Lake in February 2026 represents a rare and noteworthy occurrence of this non-native species in Libya. Although almost certainly of captive origin, the record is of interest in documenting the increasing frequency with which exotic waterbirds appear in North African wetlands (El-sowayeb & Etayeb, 2022; Etayeb et al., 2025).



Figure 1. Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* in the lake of Assaraya Alhamra (Libya).

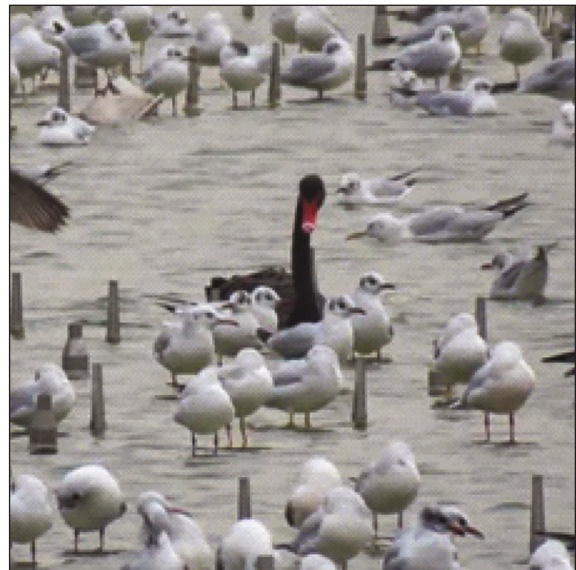


Figure 1. Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* in the lake of Assaraya Alhamra (Libya) with a flock of Gulls.

Continued monitoring is recommended to assess whether such occurrences remain isolated or increase in frequency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors extend their thanks and appreciation to

all the staff at Assaraya Alhamra Fountain (Libya) for their excellent cooperation with the team during the visit.

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