

## A black swan moment

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I was driving to Welney to birdwatch and have a coffee yesterday, and suddenly saw a strange, large black bird in the fields to my right as I scanned the fields for whooper swans and geese, making slow progress on the Fenland roads as a result.



The bird I was looking at was a black swan. I had seen a captive bird before, but here was one out in the fields, having found other swans to mix with, who were no doubt giving it ideas on how to survive in the world, which it will need, as there is no doubt this bird is an escape from captivity. It could not have got to that field any other way.

For those whose birdwatching is based on 'tick lists' of birds seen, this black swan does not count: escapees never do.

That is not the way in which I birdwatch. I know the birds I have seen. Mostly, I recall where and when I saw them if the bird is relatively rare. But what interests me most of all is birds in their context, and by context I mean whether and when they appear in the 'patches' that I seek to get to know well. Welney is one of those patches. And here was a black swan in a place I call my patch - as do others. And this, then, as far as I was concerned, was a black swan moment.

Totally unexpectedly, this bird should not have been there by rights, and yet it was, and the signs were that its white whooper swan neighbours were welcoming and showing it the ropes.

If you can't see the message in that, think again, because it should be obvious. The unusual, the unexpected, the refugee, previously a migrant, appeared welcome.

They can do it. So, why can't we do the same? The black swan moment reminded me of a simple truth, which is that welcoming the stranger matters. We shouldn't forget it.

And finally, apologies for the photo: it was taken on my phone and it was bucketing with rain, but sometimes the story matters more than the detail.