

# **13 Things You Don't Know About Swans**

by Clyde Hendrickson

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Mushroom Cloud Press  
278 Leslie Lane  
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mushroomcloudpress@gmail.com  
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Dedicated to the Yariquies brush-finch

# Thirteen Things You Don't Know About Swans

Because You're a Freaking Idiot

Based on Fact Sheet #1245, Nebraska Public School System

Mike Shackleton, Nebraska School System Copy Editor. Do I have to check all these swan facts? Must life continue to squeeze the blood from my soul, drop by drop, wrenching the very shellack of my spirit from its surface like an old man scrapes the plaque from his gums?

Mildread, his secretary: My foot surgery is tomorrow.

Shackleton: Mildred, you putrid bag of fast food cultural decline, must you plague me constantly with the chafing tang of your mind's decay?

Mildread: I can only answer one question at a time.

Shackleton: I bet a swan could understand a rhetorical question if it heard one. Ah! That's a great start for today's fact sheet, which is about swans.

Swan Fact Narrator: Actually, swans not only understand rhetorical questions, they pose them on a regular basis.

Shackleton: Sounds good. We're off to a great start. I hope the rest of the day goes just as silky smooth.

Mildread: That reminds me, I have to go get my foot blisters popped today at noon.

Shackleton. Hmm, that is not the sort of swan-like imagery I need today. Try, if you can, to imagine your life not as a pulsating blob of fatty growth, but as a magnificent white creature of the air and sea. With about your same level of intelligence.

Mildread. I love the story of the ugly duckling.

Shackleton: It's a little late for you to still be keeping up that charade, isn't it?

*(A knock is heard.)*

Mildread: I'll get it.

Shackleton. Of course you will. Do you think I'm paid \$35,000 a year plus dental, plus 401k, to rise from my seat at the piddliest of wrappings? No! For that king's ransom I am expected to produce the music of the mind – those individual sheets of Xeroxed paper that all the elementary school children of Nebraska use to learn of their world. George Washington facts hang from an apple tree. Giraffe facts are printed on their sides, along the graceful necks. The War of 1812! Well, actually, there are no illustrations on that because we decided seeing the White House in flames was not a good image for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. But still! The facts themselves are an image so powerful, a grown man would weep.

Mildread: You did weep.

Shackleton: Oh yes, my dittoes are beautiful.

*(Mildread finally opens the door.)*

Mildread. Hello?

*(Flap Jackson enters.)*

Flap Jackson: Hello, I'm Flap Jackson, the regional intern for educational development, and it is great to meet you.

Mildread: I'm Mildread.

Flap Jackson: That's just great.

Mildread: I know.

Shackleton: Ignore the sounds emanating from this aged gorgon, my friend, and let me guide you to the Ithaca of ditto development – my office.

Flap Jackson: I'm the regional intern for education development, and it is great to meet me.

Shackleton: I know it is. Now, sir, let me say bluntly that I need no intern, so I'd like your resignation soon so we can avoid a public mess.

Flap Jackson: Is this part of the ditto-making process?

Shackleton: You will never be part of that process, Mr. –

Jackson: Jackson.

Shackleton: Mr. Jackson. I –

Jackson: *Flap* Jackson.

Shackleton: - Think it would be... would be – your name is *Flap* Jackson?

Jackson: Yes, Mr. Shackleton.

Shackleton: Flap Jackson.

Jackson: Yes?

Shackleton: Quiet down, Flap. Wow. That is the best name ever. There's no room for an intern here – but there might be room for a Flap Jackson.

Jackson: I hope so. Because I was ordered to stay here for a whole day.

Shackleton: And that would be awkward otherwise. Alright, take a seat.

*(Jackson picks up a seat.)*

Jackson: Where shall I take it too?

Shackleton: A bit literal, aren't we?

Jackson: When you have a name like mine ...

Shackleton: Right. Sit down. Today we're developing a new fact sheet – I mean, fun sheet – about swans.

Flap Jackson: I'm ready! Let's swan!

Shackleton: Hold on. I'm checking my email. *(He does this. It takes more than a minute.)* Ok, where do we start?

Jackson: A title.

Shackleton: You're good. *(A silence.)* I got nothing.

Jackson: *(after thinking)* 13 Things you don't know about swans.

Shackleton: Yes... *(As though struck by something important)* Wait... wait!

Jackson: Did you think of something?

Shackleton: No, I need to check my email again. *(He does this. It takes more than a minute.)* Ok, what else you got.

Jackson: What was on the old fact sheets?

Shackleton: Mildred! The last swan sheet.

Mildred: Here you go... whoops, just spilled your coffee on it.

Shackleton: Clumsy oaf.

Mildred: I know, I was aiming for your crotch.

Shackleton: Read to me, Flapster.

Jackson: Okay...

Narrator: Vital Swan Information for America, Copyright 1942 Department of War. Fact One. Nazis make swans cry.

Shackleton: Now that's what I call a fact.

Narrator: Fact Two: Swan girls work hard in the home when the men are away at war, so Daddy will have a clean house to come home to.

Shackleton: That's a terrible thing for children to hear!

Jackson: Yeah.

Shackleton: I mean, can you imagine, doing that today – ending a phrase with a preposition.

Jackson: And they had nowhere to turn to....

Shackleton: Do not end that sentence that way.

Jackson: Because it was more than they had bargained for... what they had gotten into... stuff.

Shackleton: Perfect.

Jackson: Can we put some real facts in this? Such as,

Narrator: Swans eat a variety of snails, water insects, small aquatic invertebrates, and fish. They also eat some forms of aquatic plants.

Shackleton: Too complicated. I have a better idea. *(He makes some changes.)*

Narrator: Number three. Swans eat water plants, bugs, and stuff.

Jackson: That's pretty simple.

Shackleton: Alright, some clarification.

Narrator: Number four. Swans don't eat rocks.

Shackleton: Think the imbecile masses will be capable of processing that?

Jackson: My kid knows not to eat rocks.

Shackleton: Hmm...

Jackson: He's at the zoo today.

Shackleton: Awww, well if that isn't the most useless thing I've ever heard.

Jackson: Fact five: Swans eat fish...

Narrator: So sometimes their breath is a little fishy.

Shackleton: I think it should read –

Narrator: Their breath smells fishily

Jackson: No, that doesn't sound right.

Shackleton: Maybe this –

Narrator: Fishishily their breath –

Shackleton: No,

Narrator: Fishiliciously delicious those fishy fish.

Shackleton: Perfect.

Jackson: Doesn't make sense at all.

Shackleton: Exactly. Children need to be challenged.

Jackson: Ok, I think I have fact six.

Narrator: Two swans can make a heart if they bend their necks downwards and touch heads.

Shackleton: Yes, let me just rewrite that a bit.

Narrator: Number six. Flap Jackson, my assistant, is the lamest person alive.

*(A long silence)*

Jackson: Did you know you can make a great horned owl out of a pine cone?

*(Shackleton stares at him silently)*

Shackleton: Isn't there a black swan of some sort? A darkened varietal?

Jackson: Colored, you could say.

Shackleton: Jackson, you racist swine –

Jackson: Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't realize what I –

Shackleton. - That'll make a great fact!

Narrator: Number seven. There are black swans and there are white swans. This proves that swans are racist, just like us.

Jackson: I'm not sure that proves anything.

Shackleton: Have you seen Swan Lake? Did you write your masters' thesis on postmodern interpretations of the ugly duckling? Did you?

Jackson: I don't recall doing either of those things, no.

Shackleton: Well neither have I. But a friend once told me that Swan Lake was pretty sweet.

Mildread: Mr. Shackleton, your wife is on line one. Line one for Mr. Shackleton.

Shackleton: Yes, thank you. *(to Flap)* We only have one line. *(into phone)* Hello? HELLO? Are you there? Hello, I can't – curses.

Jackson: Bad connection?

Shackleton: No, I don't have a wife. Mildread, you've won this round, but we shall clash anon!

Mildread: Not if my Plantar Warts keep flaring up.

Jackson: I'm going to 7-11. Want anything?

Shackleton: I need a new diet coke with lime. *(Throwing away one on his desk, half-full)* This one is warm.

Jackson: You threw that away? It was half-full - Children are starving in Africa.

Mike: Well put it in a box and send it to them!

*(Jackson leaves. Shackleton is by himself.)*

Shackleton: *(singing to himself)* Shake shake shake, shake shake shake, shake your booty.... Shake your booty...

*(Mildread shakes her booty)*

Shackleton. I was not talking to you.

Mildread: Your fly is open.

Shackleton: Accursed hydra, if your glance falls again on my nether regions, those fertile grapes shall surely wither on their girthy vine, and I shall be a man no more. *(he zips)* There... I have removed the temptation.

Mildred: My eyesight is restored.

Shackleton: What was that, foul and retched urchin?

Mildred: Just glad to be retiring in three months.

Shackleton: Yes, there is a condo waiting for you at the bottom of the vat of French whore rub you apply each day... you will never have to leave the perfume factory.

Mildred: Your expense reports are late this month.

Shackleton: *(suddenly defeated)* Guh. I'll do them tomorrow.

*(Jackson returns.)*

Jackson: Swans are not friendly. Look, but don't touch!

Shackleton. Ok.

Narrator: Number eight. Swans hate freedom.

Jackson: That's not the same at all.

Narrator: Number eight. Swans hate Flap Jackson.

Shackleton: Swans are dangerous animals that can beat you. Here's the activity: we're going to release a swan in the classroom. Whoever doesn't get eaten alive, you win a goldfish.

Jackson: Kids are not responsible with goldfish.

Shackleton: Don't worry about it. The swan will leave no survivors.

Jackson: Wow, how did you ever get so smart?

Shackleton: I used to teach Quantum Literary Theory at Eastwestern Nebraska State.

Jackson. Eastwestern Nebraska? The old E-W! Where was that again – east, or west?

Shackleton: Right in the middle. *(He takes a dramatic swig)* All got fired when the school was flooded out by the Mississippi. Remarkable since the Mississippi does not flow through Nebraska.

Jackson: Remarkable.

Shackleton: I'm a remarkable man. Luckily I had good friends, too – and I landed this sweet job with health insurance and indoor plumbing.

Jackson: Wow, health insurance.

Shackleton: That would help your crippling anal fissures.

Jackson: It sure would. I can only hope to have what you have someday.

Shackleton: You should hope for more (*swig*) though you won't get it.

(*Jackson gets a phone call*)

Jackson: Hi honey, how's S.D. What? What? (*to the office*) My kid fell in the swan pit at the zoo. (*To the phone*) What's the situation? 50 to 75? All adults. My God. And they're – (*to the office*) They're circling for the kill.

Shackleton: Classic swan tactics. I bet they're flapping and squawking in order to build a cloud of confusion.

Jackson: The swans are going nuts!

Shackleton: Exactly.

Jackson: This is the end for Little S.D. Jackson.

Shackleton: S.D.?

Jackson: Silver Dollar.

Shackleton: (*Stunned, then energized*) That's amazing. What a great name. Alright, alright, we have to save this kid. Mildread – your assistance, please.

Mildread: Get bent.

Shackleton: Now Flap – can I call you Flap?

Jackson: Absolutely.

Shackleton: Flap, ask the boy where he is.

Jackson: The zoo.

Shackleton: You're under duress, so I'll let that slide. I need location IN the zoo, man.

Jackson: Ok – S.D., what are you near? (*to Shackleton*) The cougars.

Shackleton: No good.

Jackson: The otter pit.

Shackleton: Otters are complete jerkwads. No help.

Jackson: That's all he saw.

Shackleton: Mildread! The map of the Nebraska Eastwestern Zoo, posthaste.

Mildread: Hold your horses. (*She gets it very slowly*) There you go.

Shackleton: Truly inspiring performance. Let's see... swans, otters, cougars, african ungulates... wait. African Ungulates. Jackson – are there giraffes.

Jackson: S.D., were there giraffes by you? Yes!



Shackleton: Ok. We've got a chance to get him out. It's going to take all the luck we've got. But I've seen the Mississippi flood in Nebraska, and I've seen swans eat children alive... anything is possible. All we've got to do is hope to dream to dare. Can you do that, Jackson, for S.D. – nay, for all of Nebraska?

Jackson: Sweet Christmas Almighty, I sure can.

Shackleton: Peaches and cream. Mildread! *The giraffe fact sheet from 1984! Ditto number 680B!* Quickly now! *(Mildread slides over)* Curse your bunion encrusted feet, I need that ditto. *(Finally she shoves it at him)* Yes, yes. I know there's something in here about calling giraffes to your aid in crisis situations. Item one...

Narrator: Número uno. Los giraffes tienen el mismo número de huesos en sus cuellos como hámsteres.

Shackleton: What the...?

Narrator: Número dos. Parecer de los giraffes árboles.

Shackleton: Mildread! How many times must I tell you, keep the spanish ones separate from the english ones. Are you daft, woman? I was preparing you for this day of *crisis*.

Mildread: Usted es una cabeza del poop.

Shackleton: I'll get the file myself – the Nebraskan way. *(He throws the cabinet to the ground and randomly pulls out a piece of paper)*. Groovy Giraffes, 1974. Excelente. Let's see... *(reading)*. Yes. Flap, tell your boy to make a sound like an Acacia tree.

Jackson: How do you do that?

*(Shackleton demonstrates the sound)*

Jackson: Alright... S.D., make this sound. *(he repeats it into the phone. A tense silence follows.)* He says there's a giraffe leaning over the pit.

Shackleton: *(taking the phone)* Grab on, SD! Snatch his big black tongue and hang onto that shaft of deliverance like all Nebraska depends on it! Yes Yes! YES! *(to the office)* He's out!

*(Everyone cheers. Shackleton pours diet coke over his head.)*

Shackleton: My years as a primary education copy editor have all paid off. I'm so happy. *(he begins to weep)* I'm just so happy.

Jackson: Well, you're about to happier.

Shackleton: That's simply not possible.

Jackson: Oh it is, because you see, Mr. Shackleton, I am not merely an intern from the department of internal affairs.

Shackleton: You're not? You liar!

Jackson: No, I am an intern from the department of internal affairs at East-Western Nebraska State.

Shackleton: The Old E-W... it still exists?

Jackson: Yes. I'm afraid after the flood... they were worried about rehiring you. Based on all the complaints.

Shackleton: Complaints?

Jackson: You once bludgeoned a student with his own fake leg because he made fun of Andrew Jackson?

Shackleton: Someone complained about that? I'll beat them senseless.

Jackson: That's in the past. The point is... you've been reinstated. Based on your fanatical devotion to education, as evidenced by your years of service here.

Shackleton: How marvelous! And Mildred, you played along with this? You helped me?

Mildred: I would like nothing more than to see you move on.

Shackleton: Oh bless you, my sweet tub of transfatty love! (He embraces her.) Mwah. I love you too, Mildred.

Mildred: *(still being embraced)* When does he start?

Jackson: Actually, his first class is in 15 minutes.

Mildred: Here's your lunch, then. Get out of here.

Shackleton: What am I teaching?

Jackson: Advanced Ditto-writing.

Shackleton: Oh, this is so thrilling.

Jackson: I've got your University car waiting outside. It's a jaguar.

Narrator: Jaguars are south american animals with big, scratchy tongues. They can crush your skull with a single bite.

Shackleton: Just one more thing to do before I go.

Mildred: If you hug me again, I will end you.

Jackson: Make it snappy.

Shackleton: Yep! I just need to check my email.

Narrator: Fact Thirteen: Swans rarely, if ever, make sense. Try not to put too much weight on any stories you hear about them. Alright, I'm out of here. Anyone got a cigarette? Anyone? Anyone? Geesh. Fact Fourteen: You people are jerks. And fact fifteen: I am the most awesome narrator ever. Yeah, that's right. Put that in your swan and smoke it. Fact Sixteen: Swans will not get you high... Or will they?

**FIN.**