



Black swans' bit on the side

By CATHERINE BEST

SWANS have long been a symbol of monogamous love, but it seems there are love rats aplenty in the matrimonial nest.

Research of black swans' sex life shows infidelity rife among the species famed for mating for life.

DNA paternity test-

ing by the University of Melbourne's zoology department showed about one in six baby swans is a love child.

The university's Dr Raoul Mulder said the findings were unusual because male swans were typically very protective of their female companions.

Now the researchers want to catch them in the act, using state-of-

the-art tracking devices to monitor the mating habits of black swans at Melbourne's Albert Park Lake.

Dr Mulder said the often secretive mating habits of birds were hard or impossible to monitor in the wild.

But by tagging male swans with a microchip and females with a decoder, researchers will record the birds' most

intimate moments.

"When a male and female copulate, the female's decoder unit detects the microchip implanted in the male's tail feathers, registering the male's identity as well as the time of copulation," Dr Mulder said.

"All mating events are logged onto the decoder unit so that a complete record of her

mating behaviour over several weeks can be downloaded when the swan is recaptured."

The results will provide the first snapshot of a swan's true bedroom behaviour.

The tagging of 150 swans started last month and is likely to be done in time for spring breeding.



Who's the dad . . . an Albert Park swan and baby