



# Black side to swan's sex life

MELBOURNE

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

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

DNA paternity testing undertaken by the University of Melbourne's zoology department has revealed about one in every six baby swans is a love child spawned by secret matings.

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

Now the university is out to catch them in the act.

Researchers will use a state-of-



**School for scandal: Black swans' marital infidelities will be revealed in the University of Melbourne research using state-of-the-art tracking devices.**

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

The technology will also track the males' philandering.

By tagging male swans with a tiny 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 on to 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.

In mythology, swans often represent "purity and fidelity", a view Dr Mulder is keen to dispel.