

Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*



Folk Name: White Brant, White Wavy

Status: Winter Visitor

Abundance: Rare

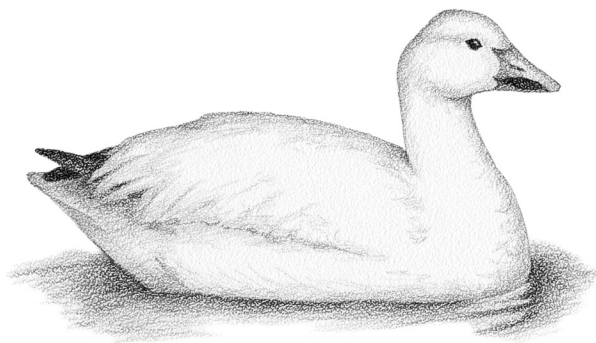
Habitat: Lakes, ponds

The Snow Goose is a large white goose with black primaries on the wings, a stout pink bill, and pink legs. The bill has a noticeable black “grinning patch” along the cutting edge. At 23 inches, this goose is almost 6 inches larger than a Mallard. Flocks numbering over 50,000 birds have been found wintering on the North Carolina coast in recent years.

Often, a dark morph individual called a “Blue Goose” will be found mixed in with our wintering flocks. These darker birds have white heads and necks, but their body is bluish-gray. The Blue Goose was once considered as an entirely separate species. Both white morph and dark morph birds have been recorded visiting the Central Carolinas.

Snow Geese are fairly regular winter visitors to the Central Carolinas. Since the 1940s, they have been found in small numbers with intermittent regularity in Anson County at Gaddy’s Pond and Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge. Members of the Mecklenburg Audubon Club photographed a Blue Goose hanging out with two Snow Geese at Gaddy’s Pond in Ansonville on March 13, 1949. The photograph made the cover of *The Chat* later that year. There are about 20 reports of Snow Geese from the rest of the region, prior to the year 2000.

Select twentieth century reports from counties other than Anson include: A Blue Goose found by Joe Norwood on a small lake in Harrisburg in Cabarrus County on November 12, 1956. Four “blue phase” geese seen by Bill and Flo Cobey at Creech’s Pond in northern York County on October 24, 1970. One Snow Goose found by Dick Brown at the Energy Explorium on Lake Norman



in Mecklenburg County on March 28, 1987. One found by Duane Crane in Gaston County on January 3, 1998, and a surprising flock of 33 found the next day in Iredell County by observers on the Iredell County Christmas Bird Count. Linda Greble reported one on Hensen’s Pond in Rowan County on January 5, 1997, and Pat Wilkinson reported one at Casar in Cleveland County on February 27, 1997.

Sightings of Snow Geese in the region have increased since the turn of the twenty-first century. Individual birds and small flocks are now seen each year in the region. Most are found between October and March. Our earliest arrival date is a Snow Goose seen with a flock of Canada Geese on September 15, 2004, along Sparrow Dairy Road in Gaston County. Our latest bird reported in the region is a Snow Goose Kim Garrett found lingering at McAlpine Park in Charlotte while she was helping with the national North American Migration Count on April 8, 1998. The largest flock ever reported in the region was an estimate of 50 birds seen in Iredell County in late February 2016. Patric Patterson provided this comment: “We were helping to inflate a hot air balloon to launch, and happened to look up. Three V’s of migrating snow’s flew over very high off the ground...Lucky sighting.”