

Ross's Goose *Chen rossii*



Folk Name: Horned Wavey

Status: Winter Visitor

Abundance: Very Rare

Habitat: Lakes, ponds

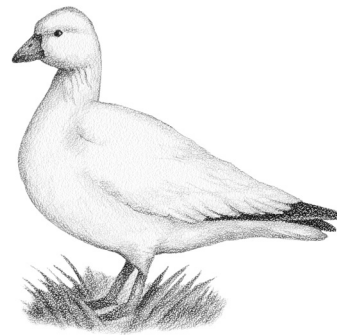
Ross's Goose is the smallest white goose found in North America. It looks like a very small Snow Goose, but with a more rounded head and a short bill. The bill lacks the "grinning patch" that is a diagnostic feature of the heavier bill of the Snow Goose. The Ross's Goose has a limited breeding range in the Arctic tundra of Canada and most winter west of the Mississippi River. However, very small numbers visit the Carolinas in winter. They are most often found foraging among large flocks of Snow Geese in the North Carolina Coastal Plain.

The first report of a Ross's Goose ever found along the Atlantic seaboard was a bird photographed at Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in 1967. A second one showed up there in 1972. These reports initially generated some controversy. There was a remote possibility they were escaped individuals and it was also known that the Snow Goose and Ross's Goose occasionally hybridize. However, after further review, the species was placed on the official North Carolina list in 1978. Sightings in North Carolina began to increase in the 1980s and became annual in the mid-1990s. A count of 10 birds in 1996 appears to have been the high count before 2000. The first Ross's Goose was not officially confirmed in South Carolina until the winter of 1995–1996, when "a very obliging individual" showed up on a small farm in Laurens County, about 30 miles west of Chester County.

On January 23, 1994, David Wright discovered the first Ross's Geese ever found in the Central Carolinas. A pair settled down on a small pond at a dairy farm in northern Mecklenburg County. They remained there through early March, providing many local observers an opportunity to add a new bird to their life list.

Since 1994, Ross's Goose has been documented at least five more times in Mecklenburg County, and more were found in adjacent counties. Determining an exact count can be difficult as flocks of geese are highly mobile, and it isn't always clear if a bird being seen at one spot is the same bird seen at another. So, observers err on the side of caution and count the bird once, unless confirmation of an additional bird is certain. In 2003, one Ross's Goose was found during the Charlotte Christmas Bird Count in a small pond off Winget Road in southwest Charlotte. This bird lingered until at least January 24, 2004. Faye Metzl found two at Winthrop Lake in Rock Hill that remained there from December 9–17, 2003.

A Ross's Goose was found at Pee Dee National Wildlife



Refuge on December 28, 2006, and stayed there for the Christmas Count. On December 19, 2010, a total of three Ross's Geese were found by observers during the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count. Two were seen in a coal ash pond on the Gaston County side of the Catawba River and one was photographed in the Town of Davidson. Later, Bill Rowse went in search of this bird to add it to his life list. He watched a flock of 15 Canada Geese fly into a small cove off Jetton Street and noted they were "coming in from open water all in a line and right in the middle of the line was the Ross's Goose."

In 2012, one was seen from December through March moving around between ponds in the University area of Mecklenburg County to Davidson and up into Mooresville, and a pair was photographed at Lake Don T. Howell in Cabarrus County. One was reported on the Spartanburg Spring Bird Count held on May 4, 2013. In 2014, a Ross's Goose was seen and photographed repeatedly in various ponds in east Charlotte. In every instance, Canada Geese were present as well. One recent report comes from Rankin Lake in Gaston County. A Ross's Goose was photographed there on February 11, 2016. Four Ross's Geese were photographed near McDowell Nature Preserve on November 30, 2017.



Ross's Goose in Davidson, NC. (Jeff Lemons)