

## A Second Ross' Goose at Pea Island, N. C.; Verification of Specific Purity of These Birds

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A Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*) was observed at leisure on the morning of 22 January 1972 by Harry LeGrand, Gard Otis, Sebastian Patti, and me beside the road at North Pond, Pea Island N.W.R., N. C. The bird was about 40 feet away feeding with about 50 Snow Geese (*Chen hyperborea atlantica*) and was easily distinguishable by its smaller size and perfectly white plumage. The Ross' Goose was studied very carefully through 60X, 30X, and 20X scopes plus binoculars. The bill was very short and stubby compared with the bills of the surrounding Snow Geese; and the large greenish-gray base of the pink bill, which had absolutely no "grinning" or "smiling" patch, were all well seen. The warty protuberances at the base of the bill were seen, but only with great difficulty. This bird had a deformed right foot and was thus undoubtedly the same bird that was first seen by Joshua Lee and Janice Lee on 27 and 28 December 1967 (*Audubon Field Notes*, 22:429) and was later observed and photographed by Paul A. Buckley et al., (*Auk*, 86:551-552). This goose has been seen occasionally during past winters at Pea Island since the first sightings, and many observers (including Harry LeGrand and author) saw the bird on the Bodie-Pea Island Christmas Count.

At 4:00 PM on 22 January we again observed a Ross' Goose with a flock of Snow Geese; however, this bird was about one-half mile away from where we had seen one earlier. The four of us immediately drove back to look for the original goose, which we found exactly where it had been earlier in the day. We then drove back to our new Ross' Goose to examine it closely. This new bird looked exactly like the other Ross' Goose except that the warty protuberances could not be noted due to the excessive distance (about 75 feet). As soon as we left this bird we found the original goose where it had been all day. Both birds were seen in flight: the original bird was later flushed and it flew perfectly well, and the new Ross' Goose once flew several feet to a safer position.

The few wintering Ross' Geese in the Midwest (they normally winter in the Central Valley of California) are known to hybridize with Lesser Snow Geese (*Chen hyperborea hyperborea*). The resulting intermediate geese more closely resemble Ross' Geese than Snow Geese, although these intermediates have a horizontal black line or "smile patch" on the bill about 6 to 8 millimeters wide, or half the width of the "grinning patch" of Snow Geese (Figure 1). Ross' Geese have no such patch. There are other marks which separate Ross' Geese from intermediate birds such as overall size, bill size and shape,

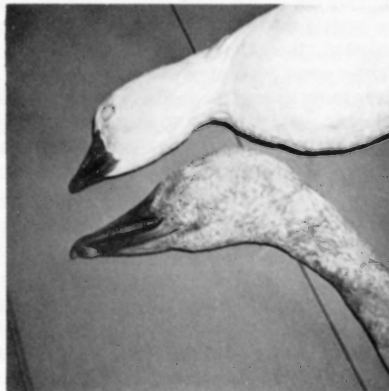
Figure 1.

Ross' Goose

Snow Goose

(Specimens from North Carolina  
State Museum of Natural History)

(Photo by Elizabeth Teulings)



extent of the gray base of the bill, and the warty protuberances on the bill (*Auk*, 88:856-873), but these are difficult to observe. We studied the two geese at Pea Island very carefully while checking for all of the marks. Because none of the characters of the intermediates were seen and since all of the marks of the Ross' Goose were noted, we feel certain that these two birds were indeed pure Ross' Geese. One of the observers, Sebastian Patti, has seen about 15 Ross' Geese in Kansas and Missouri, one of which he observed under nearly perfect conditions.

To my knowledge these two birds are the only Ross' Geese ever reported on the Atlantic coast. Because Ross' Geese have been extending their winter range eastward to the Midwest (*Auk*, 88:856-873) and since these two geese were never seen together, indicating that they came to Pea Island independently, it is quite possible that more Ross' Geese will appear on the Atlantic coast in the near future.

[DEPT. ED. -- These geese have been seen by a number of other qualified birders in addition to the careful study of the author. While it is recognized that separation of Ross' Goose from its hybrid with the Snow Goose is very difficult under field conditions, these studies have been carefully made with full knowledge of the possibilities. Thus, on the basis of this study the Ross' Goose should be retained on the hypothetical list for North Carolina. Because collection of one of these birds was not possible, every effort should be made to secure good close-up photographs to further document the record.]

### **Inland Record of a Black Skimmer At Roanoke Rapids, N. C.**

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On 6 and 7 October 1971 an adult Black Skimmer (*Rynchops nigra*) was found at Roanoke Rapids Lake just north of Roanoke Rapids, N. C. This location is about 95 miles inland from the Atlantic coast. The skimmer was discovered perched on a concrete platform directly adjacent to the V.E.P.C.O. dam structure at about 6:30 PM on 6 October.

Watching it for at least 20 minutes, I clearly saw the distinctive scissor-like bill plus all other field characteristics from about 60 feet. It was relatively tame on both days, allowing me to approach within 30 feet before flushing. When flushed, it circled low over the water, returning to its resting place on the platform after 2 or 3 minutes. If not molested, the skimmer remained perched on the platform; in fact, I never saw it take flight except when intentionally flushed. Its flights were always of short duration and never more than 100 yards from the platform. During the two days of observations, the skimmer was not seen to engage in feeding activities. Although flight appeared strong and well sustained, its apparent lack of appetite led to speculation regarding the bird's general physical condition. Its hesitation on leaving its resting spot was also puzzling.

On 7 October Bill Collier and I returned armed with cameras to take some photographs. Excellent light conditions prevailed, allowing us to secure several recognizable photographs even though our equipment was quite basic and our experience limited.

In all probability the Black Skimmer at Roanoke Rapids Lake was driven inland by Hurricane Ginger's passage through North Carolina a week earlier. The 1959 revision of *Birds of North Carolina* cites no previous inland records for this strictly salt-water inhabitant.