

## General Field Notes

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## **A Spring Banding Encounter with a White-Fronted Goose in Inland South Carolina**

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The White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) is a rare winter resident of South Carolina. There are less than a dozen records of this species from the state and only one specimen available (Sprunt and Chamberlain, 1970; Post and Gauthreaux, 1989). The mid-continental population of this species is resident from the Mississippi Alluvial Valley to coastal and inland Louisiana and Texas (*A. a. frontalis*), with very infrequent occurrences of the Greenland subspecies (*A. a. flavirostris*) in the Atlantic coastal states (Ely and Dzubin, 1994).

We report here the capture, banding and release of an adult male White-fronted Goose on the 87ha Pond B reservoir of the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS), Barnwell County, South Carolina, on 17 May, 1995.

This goose was in good condition at the time of its capture, and it flew off strongly on release the following day, after being examined, photographed and banded. The goose was captured by hand-grabbing it out of the water as a result of fortuitous circumstances of surprise and pursuit of the bird with an air boat as it fled into heavy emergent macrophyte cover that prevented its becoming airborne. Examination of this bird indicated it to be an adult (ASY) male because the bird had a penis, it had a white front and speckled belly, the

upper-wing coverts were blunt, squarish to trapezoidal, the bursa was closed to shallow and probed with difficulty (USFWS 1977).

Unusual field encounters with waterfowl such as this species always involve the possibility of escapees from avicultural collections. However, a careful examination of this bird revealed no evidence of worn or soiled plumage such as is often found in the case of escaped captives, and the hallux on each leg was intact. Federal regulations require the removal of this structure on the right leg to identify captive birds. Nevertheless, because of the remote possibility that this bird was an escaped captive, it became important to verify its identification vs. those similar species and/or subspecies that would not be expected to occur in this region. Our bird clearly lacked the "extensive white forehead and forecrown" typifying the Eurasian Lesser White-fronted Goose (*A. erythropus*) as described by Cramp and Simmons (1977), and it lacked the darker chocolate brown coloration of the dorsal plumage, head and neck of the west coast subspecies (*A. a. gambeli*).

The two subspecies of the White-fronted Goose likely to occur in South Carolina are most readily distinguished from each other by the color of the bill: bright orange in the Greenland subspecies, *A. a. flavirostris*, vs. pinkish in *A. a. frontalis*, with the former being also slightly darker (Ely and Dzubin, 1994). On the basis of these criteria, particularly its bright orange bill, we would identify our bird as being of the subspecies *A. a. flavirostris*. Color photographs of our bird, along with an account of its capture and banding, have been placed in the collection of ornithological records of the Charleston Museum. The only specimen available for this species from South Carolina, a goose shot on January 5, 1927, on a plantation in Berkeley County, was also identified as being of this Greenland subspecies by Charles E. O'Brien of the American Museum of Natural History (Sprunt and Chamberlain, 1970); Post and Gauthreaux, 1989).

The most recent accounts of this species have been in the Piedmont region (Clemson) during February of 1988 and 1987. Two additional Piedmont records were birds shot in Edgefield County. Additional sightings have been reported in February 1980 in the Santee National Wildlife Refuge located in the coastal plain region of SC (McNair and Post and Gauthreaux 1993). Ely and Dzubin (1994), however, indicate that the mid-continent population of this species is beginning to show a shift in its winter range to include a greater use of inland impoundments and lakes, with casual occurrences in Mississippi and Alabama. It is notable in this regard that our specimen was found on an inland impoundment which has enjoyed a long history of stable water level management and the consequential development of extensive areas of aquatic macrophyte cover (Whicker *et al.*, 1990). The importance of the Pond B

reservoir and the other impoundments of the SRS as inland wintering sites for migratory waterfowl has been summarized by Mayer *et al.* (1986). Bryan *et al.* (1996) have described how these same SRS reservoirs and the increasing number of other large inland impoundments in South Carolina have increased the inland abundance of Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) in this part of the state. These same reservoirs may now have also become a factor in increasing the inland range and lengthening the season of occurrence of the White-fronted Goose in this part of the state.

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