

**RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION
For Records of Vermont Birds**

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Description prepared on 4/11/14 by:

Scott Morrival

SPECIES: Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

NUMBER OBSERVED: 1

OBSERVER MAKING REPORT:

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OTHER OBSERVERS:

I was birding with Ted Murin, who was the first to find an unusual small goose while scoping a flock of Canada Geese. Ted suggested that it might be a Pink-footed Goose. I immediately got on the bird with my scope, and I agreed with the tentative ID. The two of us spent the next 30 min or so getting more complete views after which we together confirmed the ID. Ted began efforts to photograph the bird. The bird was later seen and confirmed by many observers after I posted it on VT BIRD and Ted made several phone calls.

LOCATION:

Salisbury, Addison Co., VT. The bird was in flooded fields and lowlands east of Otter Creek, on the north side of Creek Rd. The initial sighting took place approx. 1/4 mile east of the covered bridge over Otter Creek, in the flooded area to the north of Creek Rd. Later the bird relocated to a flooded area that was closer to but still approx. 1/10 mile east of the covered bridge, and still on the north side of Creek Rd.

DATE: 4/11/14

TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: The bird was initially seen at approx. 11:30 AM, and I observed it almost continuously until approx. 1:00 PM. By that time other birders had arrived and were viewing the bird. Ted and I went to get lunch and returned at about 1:45 PM. We then watched it intermittently until 2:15 PM when we departed.

DISTANCES FROM BIRD: Maximum ~400 yds. Minimum ~150 yds.

I observed the bird swimming on open water, flying, and both standing and sitting on solid ground. These views allowed all of the diagnostic field marks to be observed.

WEATHER:

wind direction W-SW wind speed 5-10 mph

sky cover mostly sunny light in relation to observer's position behind observer
temperature ~55°F

During all observations the sun was behind me, so the light quality was excellent and the bird was never backlit. The only limiting factor was heat interference, which occasionally obscured some details of the bird when it was relatively distant.

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: (make, power, etc.)

I viewed the bird through my Nikon spotting scope with a 30X lens. I also viewed the bird through Ted's scope, which has a magnification of ~78X.

OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR FORMS:

The Pink-footed Goose was a life bird for me. I have been on the lookout for this species in New England for some time; therefore I was already familiar with the major field marks as described in European and some North American field guides. I have extensive field experience with similar species, most notably Greater White-fronted Goose and domestic Greylags and their hybrids. I also have extensive field experience with other migratory geese and waterfowl species of North America. For the record, I have been an avid birder for 30 years, and I previously served as a member of the Vermont Bird Records Committee.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION: Photo Ted Murin and others have photos Tape Recording _____
Specimen _____

If yes to the above, where is this information deposited? see above

HABITAT: (be as detailed as possible, include associated bird species)

Recent ice and snowmelt produced extensive flooding of the lowlands and fields surrounding Otter Creek on 4/11/14. Creek Rd. in Salisbury passed through the flooded area. On that day, the flooded area attracted several hundred Canada Geese as well as duck species including Mallard, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Wood Duck, and Hooded Merganser. A Glossy Ibis, Bonaparte's Gulls, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes were also observed in the same flooded area and/or its extension south of Creek Rd. A Northern Harrier and an imm. Bald Eagle, no doubt attracted by the concentration of waterfowl, visited the area while I was viewing the Pink-footed Goose.

During the initial sighting the PFGO was swimming on open water in a flooded field with a flock of Canada Geese. The bird eventually emerged with other geese onto a weedy "peninsula" of land that was slightly above the water line, where it preened and napped for a while. Later, the bird flew with the Canada Geese out to open water again, and the entire flock swam westward towards the covered bridge. There it remained, swimming on open water or parked along a weedy shoreline, approx. 1/10 mile east of the covered bridge, until we left the area.

BIRD'S BEHAVIOR: (feeding actions, manner of flight, displays or interactions, reaction to observer)

The Pink-footed Goose was associated with a flock of ~40 Canada Geese, and remained with this group for the entire time that I observed it. Whatever this flock did, so did the Pink-footed

Goose. The bird, and indeed the entire CAGO flock, showed little reaction to me or to the growing flock of human observers and their vehicles, since we were restricted to the roadway that was at least 150 yds from the bird at all times. The PFGO spent some time preening and napping on shore. This siesta was briefly interrupted by the appearance of a Northern Harrier, which caused all of the resting geese to stand up and take notice until it had cleared the area. Later, an immature Bald Eagle cruised through, which elicited a more substantial reaction. The PFGO and its associated flock, and indeed many of the waterfowl in the area, took to the wing. The PFGO/CAGO flock flew to the west and put down on open water, then swam further to the west, nearer to the covered bridge as described above. The PFGO did not appear to feed at any time while I was watching it. It and its Canadian friends seemed a bit tired since many of them appeared to nap from time to time. It is tempting to speculate that this little flock had recently arrived from a long flight and was in need of rest.

VOCALIZATION:

None noted.

DESCRIPTION:

Relative size and shape: The bird was clearly, markedly smaller than the Canada Geese it was associated with. Nearly all of the views that I had of it were in direct comparison with one or more Canadas in the same scope field at the same distance, often directly adjacent to one another. Therefore the relative size difference is reliable and not subjective. In addition, the bird was relatively round-headed, short-necked, and short-billed, again in direct comparison with Canada Geese.

Head (crown, cheeks, eye, throat, nape): The head color was dark brown from the base of the bill to the crown and loreal region, grading to a slightly lighter brown on the cheeks and on the back of the head. Superimposed on the brown coloration was a series of neat, closely spaced, darker streaks running vertically down the sides of the neck and then angling back onto the nape. The center of the throat was a light brownish color, paler than the head. The eyes appeared dark in color and there was no sign of any eye ring that I could detect.

Feet and Bill (shape, color, length): I had great looks at the bird's feet and legs while it was preening, standing, and paddling. They were definitively and diagnostically pink. Not pinkish, gray-ish pink, orange-ish pink, or even orange. Just pink. The bill was small and stubby-looking, especially compared to the bills of the Canada Geese. The bill was pink in the center with black on the tip and at the base. The size, color, and pattern of the bill are another diagnostic indicator for Pink-footed Goose.

Upper back: The upper back was pale brown, becoming grayish-brown posteriorly.

Lower back and rump: The lower back was grayish-brown, distinctly darker than the upper back, with widely spaced rows of whitish scallop marks generating distinctive whitish bars on the back. The grayish-brown base color continued onto the rump, which was visible in flight, but the uppertail coverts were pure white, creating a U-shaped white band on the rump that, in flight, made a striking pattern with the tail formula (see below).

Wings (shape, length, markings): In flight the bird seemed relatively long-winged in proportion to the small overall size of this goose and especially in proportion to its short neck. Seen from above while in flight, the entire mantle/wing coverts area presented a pale contrast to the much darker flight feathers. Primary and secondary coverts presented the palest gray color, contrasting weakly with the slightly more brownish tone of the back. Therefore the striking feature of the wings in flight was a broad, dark trailing edge contrasting with a gray to grayish-brown mantle.

Breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts: The undertail coverts and belly were pristine white.

The flanks were heavily barred with a dark gray color. This color was noticeably darker than the grayish-brown color of the back, which is another excellent mark for Pink-footed Goose. Also, a white horizontal streak appeared on the resting bird where the feathers of the mantle were tucked under the darker feathers of the flanks, which further emphasized the contrast in colors. The breast was pale brown.

Tail (shape, length, markings): In the flying bird the tail was fan-shaped. The tail feathers were dark brownish-gray at the base, but with broad white tips. In flight this formula created a broad, white, U-shaped terminal band. This band, trailing the white band created by the uppertail coverts, created a striking double-U pattern in flight, with both "U"s of the double-U approximately equal in width.

IMPORTANT: WHAT SIMILAR SPECIES WERE ELIMINATED WHEN MAKING THIS IDENTIFICATION AND HOW WAS THIS BIRD DIFFERENT?

Bean Goose: The even rarer Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis*) is larger and longer-necked, has a relatively long bill, tends to be darker on the back than on the flanks, has orange legs, and has a narrow white trailing edge of the tail, and has low contrast between the mantle/wing coverts and flight feathers. All of these marks are contrary to the field marks of the bird in question.

Greylag Goose & related domestics: Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) and related domestic hybrids are large and heavy-bodied, have large all-pale bills, dark backs contrasting with pale wing coverts, and tend to have little contrast between the flank and back colors. All of these marks are contrary to the field marks of the bird in question.

Greater White-fronted Goose: Greater white-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) is similar in size to Pink-footed Goose, but different in proportions and plumage. Greater White-fronted Goose is relatively long-necked, has a long bill that can be solid orange or solid pinkish in color, has white at the base of the bill, has a very narrow white terminal band on the tail, has bold black patches on the belly, and tends to be all dark above with little contrast between flight feathers and the mantle/wing coverts. All of these marks are contrary to the field marks of the bird in question.

COMMENTS: (was age or sex determined?, etc.)

I surmise that the bird was an adult based on the dark flanks, relatively bold pink color in the center of the bill, and relatively strong barring on the back. One unresolved issue is the relatively muted grayish-brown tone of much of the upperparts. Field guides typically point out the pearly-gray color of wing coverts and the back area in PFGO, a color that may be muted in juveniles or due to wear. Whether this was actually a young bird or merely showing signs of wear due to incomplete molt will require more research on the molt sequence, plus examination of high-resolution photos if any were taken.

This report was written from notes taken during _____ immediately after _____ the observation, or written from memory X (please attach copies of notes if available)

The description of the bird that I have provided was written from memory approx. 3 hrs after viewing the bird on 4/11/14, and was done without consulting field guides, photographs, or other birders. Most importantly, while identifying the bird, Ted Murin and I called out important features to each other, but we did not discuss our detailed notes on the bird that went into our respective RSD reports. I still have not seen photos of the bird. My discussions of the bird relative to "similar species eliminated" and possible determination of the bird's age were undertaken after consulting Mullarney et al.'s *Birds of Europe, 1st addition*, and National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America, 2nd addition*.

NAME (print) Scott Morrival SIGNATURE (not req'd) _____

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DATE 4/12/14

Return electronically (preferred) to: vbrc@vtecostudies.org or mail to: Vermont Bird Records Committee, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055