

## RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION Records of Vermont Birds

The following form has been prepared to encourage full documentation, when requested, of rare or unseasonal birds in the state of Vermont. These reports are put into a permanent file and should be as detailed as possible. New reports are reviewed annually by the Vermont Bird Records Committee, which evaluates records for their acceptability to future researchers and for inclusion in the state bird list.

Please print or type

**SPECIES:** Lesser Snow Goose

**NUMBER OBSERVED:** at least 26 in flock of 87 snow geese

**OBSERVER MAKING REPORT: OTHER OBSERVERS** (and addresses if available) Hector Galbraith, 837 camp Arden Rd., Dummerston, VT-05301. David Johnston, Bonnyvale Rd., Brattleboro.

**LOCATION:** (place, township, county) Westminster, Windham County

**DATE:** 3/27/15

**TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION:** about 20 minutes in mid-morning

**DISTANCES FROM BIRD:** Maximum\_\_100m\_\_ Minimum\_\_80m\_\_

**WEATHER:** overcast, no precipitation

wind direction \_unrecorded but fairly calm\_\_\_\_\_ wind speed \_calm\_\_\_\_\_

sky cover 8/8\_\_\_\_\_ light in relation to observer's position diffuse light overhead  
temperature\_\_\_\_\_probably just above freezing\_\_\_\_\_

**OPTICAL EQUIPMENT:** (make, power, etc.) Kowa prominar 88 mm scope with 20-60 lens

**OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR FORMS:** Both observers very familiar with greater snow geese in Vermont and other northeastern states. Galbraith has some familiarity with lesser snows in Gulf Coast states

**OTHER DOCUMENTATION:** Photo \_\_yes\_\_ Tape Recording \_\_\_\_\_ Specimen \_\_\_\_\_

If yes to the above, where is this information deposited?\_\_attached\_\_\_\_\_

**HABITAT:** (be as detailed as possible, include associated bird species)  
**Partially flooded corn field on east side of railroad in Westminster. Birds were loafing close to frozen pond**

**BIRD'S BEHAVIOR:** (feeding actions, manner of flight, displays or interactions, reaction to observer)  
**Preening, sleeping and some social interaction.**

**VOCALIZATION:** (song or calls) None recorded

**DESCRIPTION:** (Describe what you actually saw during the observation. We hope that observers will take field notes during the observation and before consulting field guides, etc. Additional pages with sketches and copies of field notes are encouraged.)

Greater snow goose (*Chen caerulescens atlantica*) breed in eastern arctic and winter in the mid-Atlantic states, passing south and north on their autumn and spring migrations through New England. Lesser snow geese (*Chen caerulescens hyperboreus*) breed further to the east in the Central Canadian arctic and migrate south in the autumn and north in the spring to the west of the Appalachians, and winter in the Gulf Coast States. Greater snow geese are the most abundant snow geese migrating through Vermont (and elsewhere in New England), being recorded annually throughout the state, and in their tens of thousands at Lake Champlain. However, the situation regarding lesser snow geese in New England is at best unclear, although it is generally assumed (rightly) that greater snow geese are the most abundant race.

The two races differ in the extent to which blue morphs occur. Greater snow geese normally show only one or two percent, at most. Indeed, some authorities consider that there are no blue morphs in this race and when the odd one or two is seen they are lesser snow geese caught up in a flock of greater snow geese. Blue morphs are much more frequent among lesser snow geese, and may make up a large minority of birds.

During the week or so when these observations were made, snow geese on their northward migration were seen at three sites in Windham County. At Vernon, there was a flock of 50, all of which were white morphs. At Putney there was a flock of 46, all of which were whites. This is what we normally expect in the county. However, at Westminister David Johnston and I found a flock of 87 snow geese, out of which there were 26 blue phase (30%). Never before have we seen more than one or two blues in Windham County, and it was obvious that these birds (or, at least, 30% of them) were lesser snow geese.

Apart from the difference in color phases, lesser snow geese tend to be slightly smaller and more "petite" than greater snow geese, but these differences may not be distinguishable in the field except, with direct comparisons. We suspect that all birds in the flock of 87 were lesser snow geese, since no such differences were obvious. However, it is also possible that this flock was "mixed".

What are birds that winter in Texas and other Gulf Coast states doing in Vermont? David Johnston found scientific literature to suggest that there is a growing wintering population of lesser snow geese on the Delmarva Peninsula (may approach 10,000 birds) and we suspect that this is the origin of our birds.

**Relative size and shape:** Typical snow goose

**Head** (crown, cheeks, eye, throat, nape): lesser had white heads and upper necks. Rest of their bodies were dark grey-blue.

**Feet and Bill** (shape, color, length): as typical snow geese

**Upper back:** dark grey-blue

**Lower back and rump:** as back

**Wings** (shape, length, markings): typical snow geese

**Breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts:** vent area and undertail coverts. Belly variably white or blue

**Tail** (shape, length, markings): as typical snow geese

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

**The only contender is greater snow, but the proportion of blue phase birds eliminated this for at least 26 individuals in the flock.**

**COMMENTS:** (was age or sex determined?, etc.) The situation regarding the occurrence of lesser snow geese in New England is murky. They have been recorded in Massachusetts where Veit and Petersen report a maximum flock size of 12 blue phase birds.

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

NAME (print) Hector Galbraith \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE (not req'd) \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS 837 camp Arden Rd., Dummerston, VT 05301 \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_4/11/15\_\_\_\_\_

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

