







ROSS' GOOSE AT MIDDLE CREEK WMA
2ND STATE RECORD

112-02-1991

ON MARCH 3, 1991 FOUND A ROSS' GOOSE AT MIDDLE CREEK WMA IN LANCASTER COUNTY, SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE FIRST STATE RECORD WAS FOUND IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTY. THE BIRD WAS WITH A FLOCK OF ABOUT 800 SNOW GEESE, ON THE MAIN LAKE OUT FROM WILLOW POINT TRAIL. WHEN FIRST SPOTTING THE ROSS', I IMMEDIATELY NOTED ITS VERY SMALL SIZE AND EVEN SMALLER BILL. UNFORTUNATELY, ABOUT A MINUTE AFTER FINDING IT THE FLOCK FLEW, BUT LANDED AGAIN ON THE LAKE. AFTER SPENDING 30 MINUTES TRYING TO RELOCATE THE BIRD WITH NO SUCCESS, I WAS STARTING TO WONDER IF THE 10 HOURS THAT ERIC WITHER AND I HAD SPENT THE DAY BEFORE LOOKING AT ^{10,000} SNOW GEESE IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTY STILL HAD MY EYES FATIGUED, AND IF I HAD ONLY IMAGINED THE ROSS'. AFTER ANOTHER 10 MINUTES OF SEARCHING I AGAIN FOUND THE BIRD, SO SMALL IN COMPARISON TO THE OTHER GEESE THAT IT SEEMED TO 'JUMP' RIGHT OUT AT ME. THIS TIME I WATCHED IT FOR SEVERAL MINUTES LEAVING NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT IT WAS A ROSS' GOOSE. BESIDES ITS MUCH SMALLER SIZE I NOTED ITS SHORTER NECK AND SMALL, ROUNDED HEAD. IN COMPARISON TO THE PINK BILL OF THE SNOW GEESE WITH THEIR OBVIOUS GRINNING PATCH, THE BILL OF THE ROSS' AT THIS DISTANCE (ABOUT 125+ YARDS) APPEARED SO SMALL THAT IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO PICK OUT ANY MARKS ON IT WITH A 35X SCOPE. THE BILL COULD BE BEST DESCRIBED AS SOMEWHAT TRIANGULAR IN SHAPE, AND PROPORTIONATELY SMALL EVEN CONSIDERING THE OVERALL SMALL SIZE OF THE GOOSE. THE FLOCK ONCE AGAIN FLEW, LANDED AGAIN, AND I BEGAN WISHING ANOTHER BIRDER WOULD BE THERE TO CONFIRM THE SIGHTING. I TURNED AWAY FROM MY SCOPE AND WAS HAPPY TO SEE RANDY MILLER STANDING BEHIND ME, AND WHEN HE JOKINGLY ASKED ME IF I HAD SEEN ANY ROSS' GEESE, HE WAS QUITE SURPRISED THAT THE ANSWER WAS YES. WE WERE ABLE TO AGAIN RE-FIND THE BIRD, AGREEING ON ALL FIELD MARKS, AND WE ALSO INDEPENDENTLY NOTED THAT IT HAD PALE GRAY COLORATION ON THE BACK OF THE HEAD AND NECK, AND ALSO TOWARD THE REAR OF THE WINGS, NEAR THE BLACK PRIMARIES. WE WONDERED IF THIS WOULD INDICATE A NON-ADULT BIRD. RANDY AND I STUDIED IT FOR ABOUT 30 MINUTES UNDER FAVORABLE LIGHTING CONDITIONS.

THE ROSS' GOOSE REMAINED AT MIDDLE CREEK UNTIL AT LEAST MARCH 16, AND WAS SEEN BY MANY OBSERVERS, MOST OFTEN FEEDING IN THE FIELDS ALONG THE TOUR ROAD. AT THESE TIMES IT WAS OFTEN VERY CLOSE, AND THE BLUE-GRAY TRIANGLE COULD BE SEEN AT THE BASE OF THE BILL. WHEN STANDING UPRIGHT NEXT TO A SNOW GOOSE, THE TOP OF THE HEAD OF THE ROSS' GOOSE WAS BELOW THE BILL OF THE SNOW'S.

ALSO IN WITH THE SNOW GOOSE FLOCK WAS A SMALL RALE OF THE CANADA GOOSE. IT WAS ALMOST AS SMALL AS THE ROSS' GOOSE, AND WAS PINK-BREADED WITH A WHITE RING AT THE BASE OF THE BLACK NECK, ON THE FRONT 1/3 OF THE NECK ONLY. ITS BILL WAS VERY SMALL.

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IT ALSO SHOULD BE MENTIONED THAT AT LEAST ONE OTHER OBSERVER (JERRY BOOK) ON ONE OCCASSION, AND MYSELF ON ANOTHER OCCASSION (MARCH 16), HAD A ROSS' GOOSE WHICH APPEARED TO BE AN ADULT, SHOWING NO SIGNS OF ANY GRAY COLORATION. I ALSO FOUND IT UNUSUAL THAT THE BIRD I HAD ON THE 16th WAS FEEDING WITH CANADA GEESE, ABOUT A MILE AWAY FROM THE SNOW GOOSE FLOCK. WE KNOW THAT THERE WERE AT LEAST 2 ROSS' GEESE IN LANCASTER COUNTY DURING THIS TIME PERIOD, IS IT POSSIBLE THERE WERE 3?

Tom Garner

112-02-1991

Ross' Goose at Middle Creek Wildlife
Management Area, Lancaster County
Second State Record
Tom Garner

On 3 March 1991 I found a Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*) at Middle Creek WMA in Lancaster County, several days after the first state record was discovered (@located) in the southern part of the county. The bird was with a flock of about 800 Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) on the main lake out from Willow Point Trail.

When first spotting the Ross's I immediately noted its very small size and even smaller bill. Unfortunately, about a minute after finding it the flock flew, but landed again on the lake. After spending 30 minutes trying to relocate the bird with no success, I was starting to wonder if the ten hours that Eric Witmer and I had spent the day before looking at 10,000 Snow Geese in the southern part of the county still had my eyes fatigued, and if I had only imagined the Ross's. After another ten minutes of searching I again found the bird, so small in comparison to the other geese that it seemed to "jump" right out at me. This time I watched it for several minutes, leaving no doubt in my mind that it was a Ross' Goose.

Besides its much smaller size I noted its shorter neck and small, rounded head. In comparison to the pink bill of the Snow geese with their obvious grinning patch, the bill of the Ross's at this distance (about 125 yards) appeared so small that it was very difficult to pick out any marks on it with a 35X scope. The bill could be best described as somewhat triangular in shape and proportionately small, even considering the overall small size of the goose.

The flock once again flew, landed again, and I began wishing another birder would be there to confirm the sighting. I turned away from my scope and was happy to see Randy Miller standing behind me, and when he jokingly asked me if I had seen any Ross' geese, he was quite surprised that the answer was yes. We were able to relocate the bird, agreeing on all field marks, and we also independently noted that it had pale gray coloration on the back of the head and neck and also toward the rear of the wings, near the black primaries. We wondered if this would indicate a non-adult bird. Randy and I studied it for about 30 minutes under favorable lighting conditions.

The Ross' Goose remained at Middle Creek until at least 16 March and was seen by many observers, most often

feeding in the fields along the tour road. At these times it was often very close and the blue-gray triangle could be seen at the base of the bill. When standing upright next to a Snow Goose, the top of the head of the Ross' Goose was below the bill of the Snow's.

Also in with the Snow Goose flock was an individual of the small race of the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*). It was almost as small as the Ross' Goose, and was dark-breasted with a white ring at the base of the black neck, on the front one-third of the neck only. Its bill was very small.

It also should be mentioned that at least one other observer (Jerry Book) on one occasion, and myself on another occasion (16 March), had a Ross' Goose which appeared to be an adult, showing no signs of any gray coloration. I also found it unusual that the bird I had on 16 March was feeding with Canada geese, about a mile away from the Snow Goose flock. We know that there were at least two Ross's geese in Lancaster County during this time period. Is it possible there were three?

509 Amesbury Rd.
Lancaster, PA 17601

Record No.: 112-02-1991

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # of

Species: **Ross' Goose**

Date of Sighting: **3 March 1991 to 16 March 1991**

Observer(s): **Tom Garner**

Date of Submission: **1991**

Submitted by: **Tom Garner**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater	X						
B. Haas	X						
F. Haas	X						
R. Leberman	X						
G. McWilliams	X						
S. Santner	X						
P. Schwalbe	X						
TOTALS	7						
DECISION	X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

Tom Haas

Date:

3/7/92