

## A Ross' Goose Invasion in Winnebago County - 13 Birds!

On 8 March 1995, I began birding at 6:30 a.m. After stopping at various locations in Winnebago County, I had seen several species of resident and migrant birds, including many ducks.

About 11:30, I arrived at Howard's farm along Route 70 near Durand. This property consists of open pastureland with several ponds and streams near the Pecatonica River. It is surrounded by corn fields and woodland and known as the best place in Winnebago County for migrating geese.

I immediately noticed several Snow Geese (both blue and white morphs) with the many thousands of Canada Geese. I began scanning through the geese with my scope and spotted two white geese with black wing tips, like a Snow Goose, but they were much smaller, had short, stocky necks, and very short, stubby pink bills. They were obviously Ross' Geese (*Chen rossii*).

As I watched, most of the geese, including the Ross' Geese, lifted into the air. At this time, I noticed a large flock of approximately 200 Snow Geese flying in from the southeast. Eventually, all the geese settled down again. While scanning, I found eleven Greater White-fronted Geese, with yet more Canada and Snow Geese.

Continuing to scan, I discovered a group of 13 birds that were slightly separated from the rest of the geese. Most had their heads tucked under their wings, but three or four had their heads raised. Again, the white and black plumage, small size, short neck, and stubby bill gave away their identity. Eventually, all the birds in the group began to graze; all 13 birds were Ross' Geese.

While watching these birds for at least half an hour, I had excellent views in direct comparison to Canada, Greater White-fronted, and both forms of Snow Geese.

This flock represented the second Winnebago County record. The first Ross' Goose record for the county were the two my brother Randy and I found at the same location 21-24 November 1994. At least a few of the Ross' Geese stayed through 16 March and were seen by many other observers.

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## Illinois' First Spring Bird Count Record and Third State Record of an Arctic Tern

My winding Spring Bird Count route through western Will County typically brings me to the Braidwood Nuclear Station Cooling Lake sometime during the afternoon. A discouraging lack of migrants in the Des Plaines and Kankakee River valleys that morning had hastened my arrival at Braidwood on 6 May 1995. After tallying only six species of warblers and two thrushes, I was hopeful that something interesting like the immature Bonaparte's Gull I had seen there the day before would cross my path and add a spark of excitement to what was shaping up to be one of my worst SBCs.

As luck would have it, the Bonaparte's Gull was still flying around the same boat launch area of the lake. Finally! I next checked the mouth of the channel near the screening plant, which is in a restricted portion of the cooling lake. The metal breakwater situated at the mouth of this channel provides one of the very few offshore perch sites available on the lake. Hence, it is a fairly reliable loafing spot for cormorants, gulls, and terns that could otherwise go unnoticed on a lake of this size with its many strip mine islands. My good fortune continued as several terns - always good birds on a Will County SBC - were waiting for me.

I viewed the terns from my car from about 50 to 75 yards with a window-mounted scope. During the next hour and a half, between 1 and 2:30 pm, I observed approximately 40 terns.

The eight Black Terns present were easily separated from the other larger, lighter-colored terns. While attempting to separate the remaining birds as either Common or Forster's, I noticed one adult tern with a much smaller, all red bill. Upon closer investigation, I could see that this tern had very short legs compared with the adjacent Common and Forster's Terns. Leg length was easily discernable because the metal breakwater rose a few feet above the water. As I studied the tern's smaller build and well-rounded head further, it became quite clear that I was looking at an Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*).

Due to the strong overhead lighting, the Arctic Tern's white cheek patch and grayish underparts were not visible. In addition, I was unable to get a satisfactory view of the tern in flight to note the wingtips as field marks. I was, however, able to photograph the bird well enough to clearly depict the tern's shorter legs and smaller bill. One