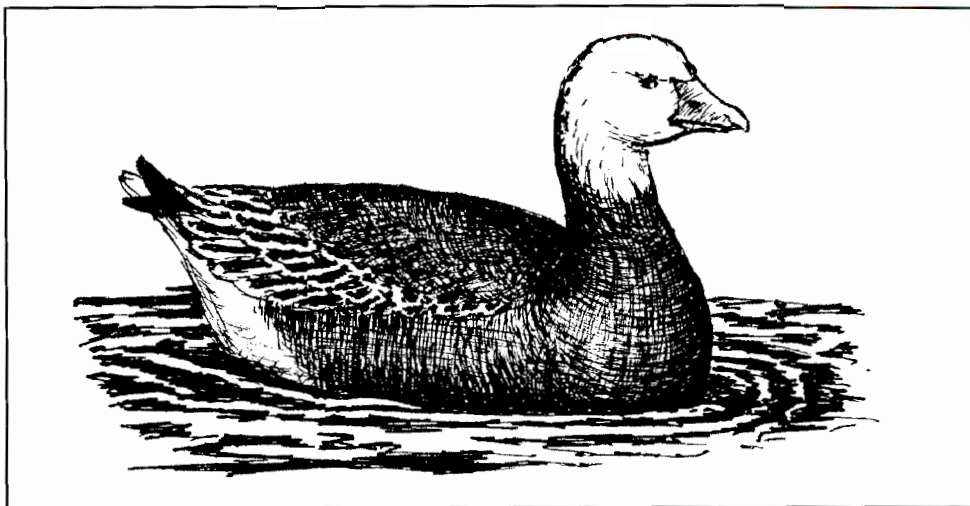


SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS - Fall Migration 1997



Blue-phase Ross's Goose. Drawing by Peter Kasper.

Blue Morph Ross's Goose at Fermilab

It was a cold and dreary morning on 23 November 1997 at Fermilab in DuPage County. Wind chills dipped into the teens. No one in our birding party was much interested in making a forced march over open ground. So we confined our birding activities to driving around to scan the many open bodies of water that were still attracting migrating waterfowl.

Ann Haverstock, Peter Kasper, and I were making these rounds in Peter's minivan, which has the middle bench removed. This provides ample space for setting up a scope and viewing out the opened-side door.

On Ring Lake we discovered a white goose among the many Canadas. The fall of 1997 was a particularly good one for Ross's Geese (*Chen rossii*), so we were not surprised to find that our goose was indeed a Ross's. Several had been seen at Fermilab since early October with several individuals observed at different times.

Peter set up the scope so Ann could have a better look. After noting the overall small size, head shape, and small bill size, Ann continued to scan the flock and came upon a white-headed goose. We collectively assumed that we were dealing with a blue morph Snow Goose. Peter looked through the scope to watch the goose swim away. At one point having seen the bill and noting the dark back, Peter offered that the bird was an immature.

As he said this, I found the bird with my binoculars. I noticed that the bird seemed to be very small and mentioned this. Peter was already realizing that his initial

thoughts on this bird were not fitting the picture. He had initially thought of immature Snow Goose because of the dark bill and a dark smudge on the back of the head. Overall the bird appeared darker than an adult blue morph Snow.

It took only seconds longer for us to realize that we were dealing with a very special blue morph goose. I took a better look through the scope. This bird was as small as the Ross's that we had just identified and was more closely matched in size to the cackling race of Canada Geese rather than the larger local race, both of which were present. The bird was darker in plumage than any blue morph Snows that I had seen. The head shape and neck length were consistent with the several other Ross's that had been seen in fall. The dark area on the back of the head was darker than on any of the previously seen immature white morph Ross's. The bill was very compact as would be expected on a Ross's, and dark overall as we had seen on other immatures of the species.

Since it is difficult enough in most years to even locate Ross's Geese in migration, we were particularly pleased to have been given the opportunity to observe an extremely rare blue morph Ross's Goose. A survey of "Illinois Birds & Birding" Vols. 1-7 and "Meadowlark" Vols. 1-6 showed no other records of blue Ross's Goose for the state.

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