

Lesser White-fronted Goose
11 Jun 1998
Lake Macbride, Johnson Co., IA
*J. Fuller, *T. Kent
IBL 68:125; P-0600

Record Number: 98-20
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATIONS

Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City 52240
Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City 52246

PHOTOGRAPH

T. H. Kent, P-0600 (not reviewed)

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:125
Records Committee: IBL 69:90

VOTE: 6 NA, 1 no vote

NA, This bird seems to be correctly identified, although I have no references to independently confirm than. Unfortunately, in the case of vagrant (and especially Eurasian) ducks and geese, I am afraid that the issue has been forever garbled by the presence of captive collections. I checked with Francis Moore, who seems to know more about this subject than most, and he was unaware of any Lesser White-fronts in captivity, but was not sure he would have noticed due to their similarity to Greaters. I am certainly willing to revisit this record if someone comes up with a case for legitimate vagrancy. The bird did appear to act wild, and the presence of the species in Alaska could argue for its possible arrival in the Midwest, a la Bean Goose.

NA, I don't know how common this species is in captivity, but it seems probable that the bird is an escape. Would we be more likely to see a natural vagrant in early spring with Greater White-fronted Geese rather than in June with Canada Geese? On the other hand, the bird's wary behavior was noted by one observer. I would like to take a conservative approach until a clear North American vagrancy pattern is established.

no vote, The ID of this species was correct, but the origin is of course questionable. I would like to hear more about whether it is a captive bird here. Adult should be on tundra breeding ground in June. This bird certainly acted wild. No vagrancy pattern for N. A.

NA, I will vote no on basis of origin for now. Would like to know if these birds are kept in captivity in Iowa.

NA, Probable escapee. I spoke with a waterfowl collector/breeder from Clinton, Ia. who said 6-8 people in Ia. own Lesser White-fronts (he owns a breeding pair), and several more are in Wis. & Minn. There is no pattern of migratory occurrence in North Am. for this species.

NA, I have no doubt about the identification and no information on possible origin of this bird.

NA, While I believe ID is correct, the question is origin. Except for 1994 Attu record, prev recs, including N. Dakota, are

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considered 'likely escapes' (AOU 1998). One for the escrow file!



Lesser White-fronted G P-0600
Lake Macbride, Johnson Co., IA
11 Jun 1998 T. H. Kent 98-20

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DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

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SPECIES: Lesser White-fronted Goose (Adult)

LOCATION: Northeast corner of the south arm of Lake MacBride (Johnson County)

DATE & TIME: 11 June, 1998 (5:55-6:15AM)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240

OTHER OBSERVERS: Discovered by James Huntington on 10 June, and also seen by Tom Kent and Dick Tetrault on 11 June.

BACKGROUND: James Huntington reported finding a bird of this species at Lake MacBride on the evening of 10 June. I arrived at the location early the following morning, and found the bird loosely associating with Canada Geese. It was on the grass with the Canada Geese near a boat ramp, and I was able to scope the bird from the car. Quite soon, it got into the water and swam out into the lake 50 yards. The Canada Geese stayed on the grass. The bird was seen in the cove across the lake starting about 6:30 AM by Tom Kent, and was seen by Dick Tetrault late that same day on a peninsula nearby. Despite searching, it was never relocated after the evening of 11 June.

DESCRIPTION: This was a relatively small goose, and appeared to be about half the size of the nearby adult Canada Geese. It was generally gray, had a small rounded head and a very short, stubby pink bill. Specifically, the back and folded wing were dark gray with white feather tip markings. The breast and belly were a lighter gray, but there were black mottled streaks on the lower breast and upper belly. The remainder of the underparts (lower belly and undertail) were white. The tail was short and black above. The neck was gray with dark vertical streaking. The head seemed small, and was rounded. The pink bill appeared very short and there was a vertical white area from the forehead to behind the lower mandible. The eye was dark, and there was a very noticeable yellow eye-ring. The legs and feet were a yellow-orange color. The bird seemed quire wary, certainly compared to the Canada Geese. I did not see it fly, nor did I hear any vocalization.

SIMILAR SPECIES: Greater White-fronted Goose is larger with a larger head and longer bill, and lacks a yellow eye-ring.

OPTICS & VIEWING CONDITIONS: It was quite early on a clear morning and I was viewing the bird at 20 yards on the grass to 50 yards on the lake, looking to the south at all times. I was using a window mount and KOWA TSN-4 telescope (20-60X).

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: None.

FIELD NOTES & REFERENCES: I made field notes in the car as I watched the bird, and the only refernce seen was Madge & Burn "Waterfowl" and that after I had returned home.

ORIGIN: There has been only one accepted record of this Eurasian species in North America, that at Attu Island, Alaska, in June, 1994. There are also a handful of sightings in the U.S., all unaccepted due to origin. This bird acted wild during my observation. Is this a bird that is kept in captivity in Iowa, or the Midwest?

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DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Species: Lesser White-fronted Goose; *Number:* 1

Location: L. Macbride, Johnson Co., IA

Date: 11 June 1998; *Time:* 6:30 to 7:50 a.m.

Name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

Others before/with/after: James Huntington found the bird yesterday.

Habitat and circumstances: artificial lake and state park.

Description of bird: I spotted the bird on the far side of the lake with 7 Canada Geese. It was half as long and its head was half as high from the water as the Canadas. It was a tiny goose, more the size of a duck and with short neck and rounded head. The bird was overall gray-brown except for the white under tail area. The bill was small (one-fourth the length of the head), concave on the upper surface, and yellow-orange. The forehead was white, giving the appearance of a white shield when viewed head on. From the side the white was almost all above the bill. There was a thin white line along the edge of the wing. As the bird moved closer, I was able to see the thin yellow eye ring. I saw the yellow-orange legs once. The bird fed by picking at the surface and was quite active as it swam. The Canada Geese sometimes chased it a short distance. After an hour, the bird flew a short distance and later flew to the end of the lake. It made a three noted tu 'tu tu sound repeatedly when flying. In flight, I could see black streaks on the breast and belly. After a short time with a second group of Canadas, it flew back to the original group.

Voice: see above. The voice was different than I have ever heard from a Greater White-fronted Goose.

Similar species: The size, tiny bill, large white forehead, yellow eye ring, and voice all distinguish this bird from a Greater White-fronted Goose, the only other alternative. I did not remember the difference in primary projection, so I did not note this feature.

Any one have reservations?: James sounded convinced.

Light: cloudy, dull; *Distance:* 100 yards (guess); *Optics:* 10x binocular, 20x scope, 560 mm lens.

Previous experience: I saw the only accepted North American record on Attu in 1994 and took photos of the specimen.

References before/after viewing: none until description typed, then I looked at Japanese and European guides.

Time of notes: through out observation period. *Final typing:* 2 hours.