

The First Record of Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin and Don Cecile. Submitted: April 15, 2017.

Introduction and Distribution

The Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) is a species of waterfowl that breeds on arctic tundra and mountainsides in Greenland, Iceland, and Svalbard which is a Norwegian archipelago between mainland Norway and the North Pole (Boertmann 1994, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). This species is a short distance migrant that winters from in the British Isles, mostly in Scotland (Boertmann 1994), and into North-western Europe from Denmark, northern Germany into the Netherlands (Jonsson 1992). The Pink-footed Goose is a casual, but increasing vagrant along the East Coast of North America with records in Canada from Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia, and records in the United States from New England south to Pennsylvania, and Delaware (Sherony 2008, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). There are no accepted records for central or western North America (Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

There is a record for Washington State that involved up to 2 birds observed over 2 years (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). The records are as follows: 1 bird first found at Hoquiam, then Elma, Grays Harbor County, November 5, 2003 -January 11, 2004; then 2 birds found at Hoquiam February 21-April 10, 2005, and later 1 bird found at Elma November 5, 2003-April 21, 2005 (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). These birds were photographed and the identification was confirmed as correct, but these records were not accepted by the Washington Bird Records Committee due to uncertain origin concerns (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008).

A recent record in British Columbia of 2 birds found in the Victoria area from January 18-1 February, 2017, also has uncertain origin concerns (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.).

There are no accepted records for California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017), Oregon (OFO 2016), or for Alaska (Gibson *et al.* 2017).

Identification and Similar Species

The Pink-footed Goose is illustrated in some North American Field Guides such as Dunn and Alderfer (2011), but it is better illustrated in European Field Guides such Mullarney and Zetterstrom (2009). The Pink-footed Goose is a middle sized species measuring 64-76 cm in length, with a wingspan of 137-161 cm (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). Similar looking species of the Pink-footed Goose are its close relatives the slightly larger sized Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser serrirostris*) which measures 71-84 cm in length, and the Taiga Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis*) which measures 76-90 cm in length (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

Either of these species would be accidental vagrants to British Columbia. The only species commonly occurring in the province that is somewhat similar looking is the Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) which is slightly larger than the Pink-footed Goose, measuring 71 cm in length, with a wingspan of 134 cm (Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

The following description of Pink-footed Goose is taken from Mullarney and Zetterstrom (2009).

Adult birds are slightly smaller and more compact than Taiga Bean Goose, but are about equal in size and proportions to Tundra Bean Goose. The legs are pink which are diagnostic of the species, however, these can be difficult to determine at some distance or in poor light. The bill is short and triangular, typically mostly black with only a pink band across the outer part. The head is rounded, neck rather short. The head and upper neck are dark gray-brown, contrasting with paler lower neck and body. A few birds have a thin white rim at the base of the bill. The lower neck and body are pale-brown-gray, with upperparts often looking frosty due to a blue-gray cast. The breast has a pinkish-buff coloration. The flank area is the darkest part of the body, and is darker than the back.

Juvenile birds resemble adults, but most are less distinctive, looking a little darker and browner, with less contrast between the head and body, and lack the blue-gray cast above. The upperparts are more scaled (Madge and Burn 1988). The leg colour is duller and less clean pink than seen on adult birds.

In flight, upperwing and back very pale, distinctly lighter than seen on either species of Bean Goose or on Greater White-fronted Goose.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Pink-footed Goose is one of the more unlikely vagrant species to have been reported in British Columbia. There is a recent record of 2 birds originally found and photographed by John Peetsma in the Martindale Flats area of Saanich, outside Victoria, on January 18, 2017 (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.). The birds were thought to be Greater White-fronted Geese and this sighting did not come to light until they were independently discovered and photographed by Liron Gerstman who correctly identified them as Pink-footed Geese on January 22, 2017 (M. Hafting Pers. Comm.). The birds wandered about Saanich and the Victoria area and were seen by many observers till March 19, 2017 (D. Cecile Pers. Obs.). They were even recorded as far north as Cherry Point Road in Duncan from March 3-5, 2017 and were noted travelling back to the Victoria area within this time frame (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). The countability of these birds is problematic as they are kept in captivity, but not commonly, and have been seen in at least

one collection of waterfowl in the Lower Mainland (R. Tootin Pers. Obs.). The Pink-footed Goose was critically endangered, with Svalbard populations plummeting to less than 5000 in the 1950s and Greenland and Iceland populations reaching 20,000-30,000 in the 1930s; by the mid- 1990s, the Svalbard population exceeded 38,000 and the Greenland and Iceland populations had reached about 250,000 (Boyd 2005). Breeding estimates of the Greenland and Icelandic populations indicate some 1,000 pairs in Greenland and 10, 000 pairs in Iceland (Madge and Burn 1988). From monitoring winter counts it is evident that both populations are increasing, although changes in agricultural practices in recent decades have shifted some of the wintering grounds, as is the case in western Germany where less than 1,000 birds now winter (Madge and Burn 1988). The overall increase in the Pink-footed Goose population has been paralleled by an increase in reports from eastern North America (Sherony 2008, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Pink-footed Geese share their breeding range with the Greenland form of Greater White-fronted Goose (*A. a. flavirostris*) which, like the Pink-footed Goose, there are no North American records west of Pennsylvania (Sherony 2008). There is a record for Washington State of 1 and then 2 birds that were seen in the Hoquiam, and then Elma, in Grays Harbor County, from November 5, 2003- April 21, 2005 (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). The birds were found with migratory wintering geese and did leave the region each winter during the summer months (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). The Washington Bird Records Committee found that this species is rare, but not unheard of in captivity (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). Consequently, the possibility that the birds could be escapees, coupled with the lack of records west of Pennsylvania for this species or for Greenland Greater White-fronted Goose (*A.a. flavirostris*) led the Washington Bird Records Committee to reject this record based on questions of origin (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008).

Of note, both British Columbia and Washington lie directly on a 180' mis-orientation path for this species (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). So to play devil's advocate, a breeding pair of Pink-footed Geese from Greenland or Iceland could somehow get oriented in the exact opposite direction of its usual fall migratory path and could if they found themselves with migrating geese heading south to the west coast, eventually end up in either British Columbia or Washington State (Mlodinow and Aanerud 2008). If in the future more records of this species are encountered along the central flyway and on the west coast, it is possible a pattern of vagrancy will develop. Until more records are found in British Columbia and the surrounding region, it is recommend being cautious with this record and leaving this record as identification of species is correct, but the origin as uncertain.



Figure 1: Record # 1: 2 Pink-footed Geese in flight near Blenkinsop Lake, Saanich on February 14, 2017. Photo Don Cecile.



Figure 2: Record # 1: 2 Pink-footed Geese near Blenkinsop Lake, Saanich on February 14, 2017. Photo Don Cecile.



Figure 3: Record # 1: Pink-footed Goose near Blenkinsop Lake, Saanich on February 14, 2017.
Photo Don Cecile.



Figure 4: Record # 1: Pink-footed Goose near Blenkinsop Lake, Saanich on February 14, 2017. Photo Don Cecile.

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