

WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE MIGRATION ROUTE THROUGH NORTHEASTERN SASKATCHEWAN

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The White-fronted goose is a common autumn and spring migrant through southern Saskatchewan, especially in the Eston-Kindersley-Kerrobert and Quill Lakes-Last Mountain Lake districts. However, the migration routes followed by this species both from and toward their tundra breeding grounds, are still relatively unknown. This note is presented in the hope that it will clarify and document a spring and autumn route through northern Saskatchewan.

During the wildlife investigations of the Churchill River Study some interesting observations of migrant White-fronted geese were made. Approximately 160 birds were observed (G. Brewster and J. Polson) flying south along the Reindeer River on 12 and 13 September 1973. Sixty-five of these birds stopped to rest and feed along the exposed beaches of the river some 3 miles south of the Whitesand Dam ($56^{\circ} 10'$ lat., $103^{\circ} 10'$ long.). The following spring on 23 May, 1974, three flocks totalling about 450 birds were observed (G. Brewster and D. Hjertaas) flying north over Wintego Lake on the Churchill River ($53^{\circ} 35'$ lat., $102^{\circ} 50'$ long.).

Relatively few observations have

been made of White-fronted geese at these northern latitudes. Nero⁷ presents no information on these birds in northeastern Saskatchewan, nor does Manning⁴ mention them in his ornithological studies between Reindeer and Baker Lakes. North of Saskatchewan, Mowat and Lawrie⁶ present several records of migrant and breeding White-fronted geese in the Angikuni and Beverly lakes area of the Northwest Territories, however they state "... its apparent rarity as a migrant south through Keewatin" is notable. In fact they went on to suggest that these birds appeared to reach this breeding area from the west via an interior, Central flyway, as opposed to the Hudson Bay coastal route used by Snow geese. Harper² mentions only one bird observed in southern Keewatin. This was collected near the mouth of the Windy River in June, 1947.

At present, banding returns suggest that there are two distinct segments to the Mid-Continent Population of White-fronted geese; an eastern oriented segment and a western one.⁵ This distributional information suggests that birds observed on the Churchill River Study were likely from the eastern segment which breeds in the Keewatin District, Victoria and King William Islands, and winters in Louisiana and eastern Texas. Evidence presented by Kuyt³ indicates since the 1950's this species has grown

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in numbers and expanded its breeding range, especially along the Thelon River, N.W.T.

Several observations have been made of migrant White-fronted geese in eastern Manitoba along the coast of the Hudson Bay.^{2 8 9} Some of these birds were observed with migrant Snow geese but none of the sightings were of large flocks. No previous documentation is available to show, that these eastern segment birds, which congregate in southern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan, migrate inland through northeastern Saskatchewan and northwestern Manitoba to any extent. Our observations suggest that at least a portion of the eastern segment White-fronted geese use an inland route on both spring and autumn migration.

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¹HARPER, F. 1953. *Birds of the Nueltin Lake Expedition Keewatin*. 1947. Amer. Midl. Nat. 49:11-116.

²JEHL, J. R. and B. A. SMITH 1970. *Birds of the Churchill Region, Manitoba*. Spec. Publ. No. Man. Mus. Man and Nature. Winnipeg. 87 p.

³KUYT, E. 1962. *White-fronted geese breeding the Thelon Valley, N.W.T.* Can. Field-Nat. 76:224.

⁴MANNING, T. H. 1948. *Notes on the count birds and mammals west of Hudson Bay between Reindeer and Baker Lakes*. Can. Field-Nat. 69:28.

⁵MILLER, H. W., A. DZUBIN and T. SWEEP 1968. *Distribution and mortality of Saskatchewan banded white-fronted geese*. Trans. N. Am. Wildl. Nat. Res. Conf., 33:101-119.

⁶MOWAT, F. M. and A. H. LAWRIE. 1955. *Observations from southern Keewatin and the interior of northern Manitoba*. Can. Field-Nat. 69:93-116.

⁷NERO, R. W. 1967. *The birds of northeastern Saskatchewan*. Spec. Publ. No. 6. Sask. Hist. Soc., Regina. 96 p.

⁸PREBLE, E. A. 1902. *A biological investigation of the Hudson Bay region*. North Amer. Fauna, No. 22. 140 p.

⁹TAVERNER, P. A., and G. M. SUTTON 1919. *The birds of Churchill, Manitoba*. Annals of the Carnegie Mus. 23:1-83.



White-fronted geese. Last Mountain Lake.

Ken Lum