

PINTAIL PARASITIZING SNOW GOOSE NEST

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On May 27, 1975, an active Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens caerulescens*) nest containing two Snow Goose eggs and one Pintail (*Anas acuta*) egg was found on the La Pérouse Bay Snow Goose colony located 30 km east of Churchill, Manitoba. The nest was situated near the edge of a small (0.5 ha) delta island in the Norton River, this being one of the last vegetated islands of the foreshore flats. Lime grass (*Elymus arenarius mollis*) and willow (*Salix sp.*) were the predominant vegetation.

The nest was examined daily for three days after the initial observation, and by May 30, 1975, contained four Snow Goose eggs in addition to the Pintail egg. Subsequent observations at intervals of two days until June 7, 1975, revealed that all five eggs were being incubated (incubation commenced May 29 or 30) and that the male Snow Goose was defending the nest territory. The nest was examined intermittently from June 7 to 22, 1975, when we found evidence that the Pintail egg had hatched and that the remaining three eggs had been abandoned (one egg had been collected June 7, 1975, as part of a research project). Examination of the remaining eggs indicated that all were fertile and very close to hatching when abandoned. On June 23, the male and female Snow Geese were observed with the duckling in the vicinity of the abandoned nest. No further sightings were made of this "family."

Four other Snow Goose nests were situated on the island, the closest being some 20 m distant. No eggs of other species were found in these or, with one exception, (see below), in any

of the other Snow Goose nests studied on the colony. No Pintail nests were found in the immediate vicinity although others were found on islands further from the coast on a brackish lagoon. These were smaller islands with more willow cover and such nests were usually hidden among the willows.

One other Snow Goose nest contained one Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima sedentaria*) egg. Also one Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis interior*) nest was found containing four Canada Goose eggs, one Common Eider egg and a Snow Goose egg. The nests were within 10 m of each other and an eider nest was discovered within 3 m of the Canada nest. Two other eider nests were located about the same distance from the Snow Goose nest on an adjoining island. Willow and lime grass were the predominant vegetation. No further examination of these nests was made until late July, by which time all nests were empty. There was no evidence of hatching or predation.

Weller cites instances of Pintail laying eggs in the nests of Canada Geese, Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Redheads (*Aythya americana*).⁶ No instances of Pintails laying eggs in Snow Goose nests appear to have been reported in the literature. Dump nesting and intra-species parasitism have been reported for both Snow Blue Geese and the Canada Goose.³⁻⁵ Canada Geese have also been reported to lay eggs in the nests of Mallards and in the nests of Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*).²⁻⁴ The American (Common) Eider has laid eggs in the nests of the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and it

own species.⁶ In the case of the eider it would not seem too surprising to find this species parasitizing nests of other species when nests are in close proximity. Fred Cooke and associates have found this to be a fairly common occurrence in the La Pérouse Bay colony (pers. comm.). Weller has indicated that of all non-obligate parasites, waterfowl (*Anatidae*) are most noted for laying eggs in the nests of other birds.⁶

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¹BENT, A. C. 1925. Life histories of North American wild fowl. Part 1. U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull. 126: 244 pp.

²BOYER, R. L. and M. J. PSUJEK. 1975. Canada Goose parasitizing Mallard nest. Wilson Bull. 87(2):287.

³COOCH, F. G. 1961. Ecological aspects of the Snow-Blue Goose complex. Auk. 78:72-89.

⁴FANNIN, J. 1894. The Canada Goose and Osprey laying in the same nest. Auk. 11:332.

⁵PREVETT, J. P. and L. S. PREVETT, 1973. Egg retrieval by Blue Geese. Auk. 90(1):202-204.

⁶WELLER, M. W. 1959. Parasitic egg laying in the Redhead (*Aythya americana*) and other North American Anatidae. Ecol. Monogr. 29:333-365.

A pair of Pintail drakes

Fred W. Lahrman

