

A BAR-HEADED GOOSE SEEN IN REGINA — A POSSIBLE FIRST FOR NORTH AMERICA

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About 2:30 p.m. on 11 September 1993, a sunny afternoon, I was at the display ponds which are located east of the Centre of the Arts, across Lakeshore Drive in that part of Wascana in Regina between Wascana Parkway on the west and Highway No. 1 bypass on the east. As I casually approached a flock of grazing geese I was amazed to see a single Bar-headed Goose on the far side of the grazing geese. I approached to approximately 9 m from the bar-head. It eyed me suspiciously but did not panic because, I believe, the pinioned Snow Geese and the free-flying Canada Geese there took no particular notice of me as all are used to people who often feed them.

I had no camera with me so I retreated and drove home and got it. While there, I made several phone calls and told those I could get in touch with about the Bar-headed Goose. I then returned to the display ponds where I saw Frank Brazier in position watching the bar-head. I then got into a good position to take pictures.

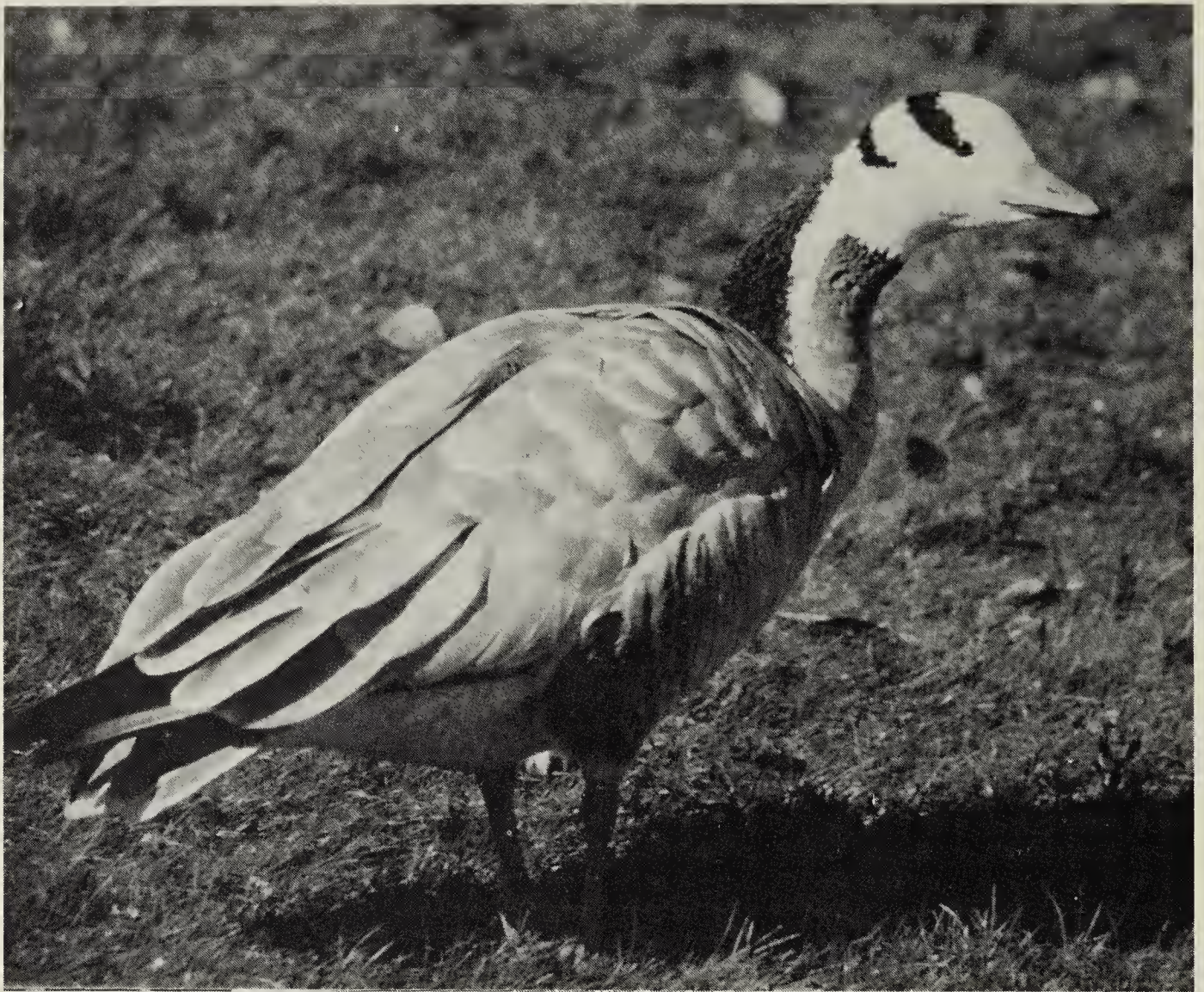
Others arrived: John Nelson, Elmer Fox, Ferne Lawrence, Sandra and Bob Ewart, and Bill Dohaniuk, who all admired our visitor. Robert Kreba came and mentioned that Bar-headed Geese are commonly kept in zoos and private collections; one

would expect that such birds would wear leg bands but our bar-head had none.

I left the area and returned in the evening. The bar-head was not in the display ponds area. It had flown over the display ponds fence and settled on the grass adjacent to the west and near Wascana Lake where I soon found it, feeding alone on the grass. When I walked toward the bird it seemed very wary and about to fly so I stopped walking toward it. The bird quickly slipped into the lake and swam behind a screen of bushes. I saw it no more that day.

The bar-head has developed a regular pattern, more or less. I have observed that it joins flights of Canadas flying out to feed in the fields, returning to rest at various places during the day. It is a large area so I see the bird only irregularly. The last time I saw it was 31 October or 1 November 1993.

It occurred to Frank Brazier that if this was an escaped bird it could have flown up from the USA. If the bird had been imported from collections in the USA there would need to be some sort of permit. Accordingly, he got in touch with Rick Douflin of the Canadian Wildlife Service who said that the Department of Agriculture, Livestock Branch, would issue



Bar-headed Goose in Regina, 11 September 1993

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permits. It turned out that such birds are brought to Customs with certificates that they are free from disease. The Livestock Branch does not require that the birds be leg-banded.

Imported birds would be familiar with people and used to being fed regularly. If our bar-head was such a bird it would not fly out with the Canadas but would remain in the display ponds where the geese are fed regularly.

Todd indicates that in its home range, the Bar-headed Goose is hunted regularly.⁴ Thus, our bar-head displays marked wariness. I believe it is about two years old so it is probably a survivor of the hunt.

Everything I have observed leads me to believe that the Bar-headed

Goose, seen and photographed in Regina, is a wild, free-flying visitor from northern Asia. Why it flew to North America, no doubt via the relatively short hop across the Bering Sea, is not known but once over it could very well have joined south-bound geese and eventually reached Regina. [See editor's note that follows.]

Nowhere can I find any reference to any previous occurrence of this species in North America, other than any seen are probably escapees from captivity.^{1,2,3}

1. GODFREY, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. 595 pp.
2. JOHNSGARD, P.A. 1978. Waterfowl of North America. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington. 575 pp.
3. OGILVIE, M.A. 1978. Wild geese. Buteo Books, Vermilion, SD. 350 pp.

4. TODD, F.S. 1979. Waterfowl: ducks, geese and swans of the world. Sea-world Press, New York. 398 pp.

Editorial Note

The following two quotes illustrate the concerns many ornithologists have with sighting of certain species.

From Ralph Palmer's *Handbook of North American Birds*, the following observation on presumed natural occurrence of certain species is worth consideration (p. 243, Red-breasted Goose and others) "among the larger free-flying waterfowl seen in North America, and of very dubious origin, are the Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) and the Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*)." ¹

Another informative observation on the Bar-headed Goose is given in a handbook of the birds of Europe:

"Breeds in high central Asia; south-east Russian Altai to west Manchuria, south to Ladakh, Tibet and Inner Mongolia. Overwinters on southern edge of breeding range (e.g., valleys of south Tibet), but majority migrate over Himalayas into Pakistan, north India and Bangladesh. No reliable indications of westward vagrancy. Identified various European countries north to Finland and Sweden, south to Spain, but such birds so obviously escape that many must go unrecorded; common in ornamental waterfowl collections, free-flying at some. A feral population in Kalmarsund, south-east Sweden, from c. 1930, but probably failed to become established and perhaps now dispersed." ²

In northern states east of the Rockies, specifically Montana and Idaho, several hundred Bar-headed Geese are held as part of private avicultural collections. Further south,

small collections exist in Nevada while 100's-1000's exist in California collections. It is possible that the Regina sighting represents a free-flying bird from California which migrated with Ross' and Snow Geese from the San Joaquin Valley. In Canada approximately 100 Bar-headed Geese are owned by aviculturists: 11 west of Ontario, 50 in Ontario and 35 east of Ontario.

Difficulties do occur in the confirmation of new or unique species to Saskatchewan. The following individuals or agencies may be able to help you determine whether or not the bird you encounter is a wild vagrant or "an escaped prisoner" from a zoo or an avicultural collection. The list of sources is a representative sample. If you cannot determine the status of the species from people such as these then err on the conservative side. Aviculturists in the United States have less stringent permitting systems than do their Canadian counterparts, therefore identifying escapees from aviculturists in the United States poses a large problem. In addition, many aviculturists do not mark or band all the birds in their collections which adds to the birder's dilemma.

Agencies, Aviculture Groups and Individuals Migratory Bird Species

G. Bogdan or B. Petrar,
Wildlife Enforcement Division,
Environmental Protection Branch,
115 Perimeter Road,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan,
S7N 0X4

G. Whitney,
Wildlife Enforcement Division,
Environmental Protection Branch,
Room 513, Federal Building,
269 Main Street,

Winnipeg, Manitoba,
R3C 1B2

CITES Information
(CITES = Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species)
c/o D. K. Pollock,
Canadian Wildlife Service,
Ottawa, Ontario,
K1A 0H3

Importation of Exotics

Dr. R. McLean,
Regional Veterinary Specialist,
Import/Export Section,
Food Production
and Inspection Branch,
Agriculture Canada,
Room 210,
1955 Broad Street,
Regina, Saskatchewan,
S4P 4E3

or ask for address of Import Permit
Office, Agriculture Canada, Ottawa

Zoos

B. Misner,
Manager,
Forestry Farm Park
and Zoo,
City of Saskatoon,
1903 Forest Drive,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan,
S7S 1G9

R. Henning,
Acting Zoo Director,
Assiniboine Zoo,
2355 Corydon Avenue,
Winnipeg, Manitoba,
R3P 0R5

Canadian Association of Zoological
Parks and Aquariums,
c/o Calgary Zoo,
Box 3036, Station B,
Calgary, Alberta,
T2M 4R8

American Association of Zoo-
logical Parks and Aquariums,
Wheeling, West Virginia,
26003
(International Species Inventory
System)

Aviculturists and Avicultural Societies

Gordon Howe,
Shelterbelt Centre,
Box 940,
Indian Head, Saskatchewan,
S0G 2K0

American Pheasant
and Waterfowl Society,
Attention: Lloyd Ure,
W2270 US Highway 10,
Granton, Wisconsin,
54436

Canadian Ornamental, Pheasant
and Game Bird Association,
Attention: Sheila Mannen,
Box 36,
Lyden, Ontario,
L0R 1T0

1. PALMER, R.S. 1976. Handbook of North American birds. Vol. 2: waterfowl (Part 1). Yale Univ. Press, New Haven. 522 pp.
2. CRAMP, S. 1977. The birds of the western Palearctic. Vol. 1: ostrich to ducks. Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford. 722 pp.

