

# Snow Geese - What birds are we talking about?

## Species



Ross' geese are often mistaken for lesser snow geese due to their similar appearance. However, Ross' geese are smaller, have a shorter bill, and have a faster wing beat.



Lesser snow geese (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) and Ross' geese (*C. rossii*) flock together on the breeding grounds, wintering grounds, and on stopovers along the migratory route. They are very difficult to distinguish when they mix together.



Larger lesser snow geese constitute the majority of the birds causing habitat degradation in the Arctic due to their aggressive feeding strategies. Lesser snow geese graze, grub (overturn the soil in search of roots), and pull and break shoots of grass.



The rapid growth of these species' populations coupled with their feeding strategies has exerted significant pressures on the breeding grounds resulting in widespread habitat degradation (link to pictorial) that affects numerous migratory birds, including lesser snow and Ross' geese. The populations must be reduced to halt the degradation and allow the breeding grounds to recover and sustain rich ecological diversity so many species have come to depend on.

## Coloration

Geese are referred to either as "light" geese or "dark" geese based on their basic coloration. Snow and Ross' geese are "light" geese. Most lesser snow and Ross' geese exhibit a white phase where the whole goose is white. However, some lesser snow and Ross' geese also exhibit a "blue" phase where they are brownish with a primarily white head. At one time, blue phase and white phase lesser snow and Ross' geese were considered to be two different species. Genetic research determined that

were indeed the same species with two color phases.

Canada geese and white-fronted geese are “dark” geese. These species exhibit a brownish color over their entire body with white or lighter accents in some cases. Dark geese do not exhibit another color phase.



## Geographic Regions

The lesser snow and Ross' goose populations causing the habitat degradation in the central and eastern arctic and subarctic breed in the eastern and central portions of northern Canada and migrate south and winter in the Central and Mississippi Flyways, also known as the “Mid-continent” regions of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. They spend the winter primarily in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Louisiana, and Arkansas and in some northern States in Mexico.

