

SNOW GOOSE

Chen caerulescens

non-breeding visitor, vagrant

C.c. caerulescens

The Snow Goose breeds in NE Siberia and throughout arctic North America and winters from Pacific coastal states S to n. Mexico, and in Japan and eastern China (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1952, AOU 1998). Vagrants have occurred in Europe (Cramp and Simmons 1977), the Marshall Is (Wiles 2005), and in the Hawaiian Islands, where they are rare but may be increasing in occurrence. An unusual flock of 35 juveniles recorded in Oct 2016 would be unprecedented for Hawaii if of natural occurrence (see below).

A bird reported by naval personnel as the first returning Laysan Albatross of the season to Sand I., *Midway* 14 Oct-23 Dec 1983, turned out to be the only record thus far of a Snow Goose for the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands* (P. Pyle 1984; [HRBP](#) 0256, 0390, 0391, published *E* 44:107).

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands* there are substantiated records for 32 individuals plus one unusual flock of 35 birds, all of which presumably arrived in fall (earliest arrival 1 Oct) and variously remained into winter or spring (latest spring date 31 May), with two individuals remaining to over-summer. On *Kaua'i*, two adults were observed flying near Hanalei, 21 Nov 1991, with one remaining to winter at Hanalei NWR through 27 Apr 1992, another was present at Kawaiiele 19 Oct 06-26 Apr 07 ([HRBP](#) 5847-5849), and one first seen at Hanalei NWR 1 Oct 2010 ([HRBP](#) 5978) remained to over summer for three years, usually observed with [Hawaiian Geese](#) here or at Kilauea Lighthouse, and was last reported in May 2014. On *O'ahu*, early records involved one at Hau'ula 8 Feb 1903 (presumably the bird mentioned by Perkins 1903) and three observed at Waimanalo 10 Oct 1904, one of which was collected (BPBM 3154 mounted). A first-winter bird was observed at Haleiwa 18 Oct 1958-20 Jan 1959 (*E* 19:36, 58; Udvardy 1961; *E* 21:80); one at Waipi'o Peninsula 9-10 Oct 1982 ([HRBP](#) 0190-0193, published *AB* 37:227) was observed dead 11 Oct (specimen could not be retrieved); two first-year birds were Ki'i Unit of JCNWR, 20 Oct 1991-early May 1992 (*E* 52:21); two first-year birds were photographed at Turtle Bay Resort 27 Oct 2015-14 Mar 2016 ([HRBP](#) 5979); and an adult was observed at Kapolei Golf Course 25 Nov 2015- 15 Jan 2016. An undated specimen (but possibly from 1955) from the Honolulu Zoo, YPM 7765, is possibly of a wild bird. On *Moloka'i*, an adult was observed at Kaunakakai 1-12 Oct 1998, two first-year birds were observed at Ohioipilo wetlands 16 Nov 2013-31 May 2014, and another first-year bird flew over the northern coast 12 Nov 2015. A mounted specimen (present location unknown) was collected on *Maui* by Newell prior to 1893 (Rothschild 1900), the first record for the Hawaiian Islands. Elsewhere on Maui, individuals were observed at Kanaha Pond in early Nov-4 Dec 1941 (*E* 2:64) and 17 Nov-Feb 2010; at Kealia Pond NWR 23 Nov 1966 (*E* 27:88, 28:5), 4 Jan 2007-7 Mar 2008 (over-summering in 2007), and (2 birds) 26 Apr-13 May 2014 (determined to be the same birds observed on Moloka'i before and after this period); and near Cape Kinau two present late Dec 1995-27 Jan 1996 (photo in local newspaper, [HRBP](#) 1082-1083,1085). Berger (1972, 1981) also mentions records from Maui from 1904, 1967, and 1970. On *Hawai'i I*, one was observed near Kea'au late Nov 1986-2 Apr

1987, two were at Punalu'u 3-5 Dec 2009 ([HRBP 5707, 5718](#) published NAB), and one observed in Hilo 4 Oct 2015 could have been one of two first-year birds present at Na'alehu 8 Nov 2015- 21 Feb 2016.

On 20 Oct 2016 an unusual flock of 35 juvenile Snow Geese was photographed off Keahou, Hawai'i I 20 Oct 2016 ([HRBP 6321](#)), followed by one juvenile E of Kaunakakai, Moloka'i 30 Oct-21 Nov 2016 ([HRBP 6322](#)), five juveniles at Kanaha Pond, Maui 7 Nov 2016, and six juveniles near the Hilo Airport 8 Nov 2016. The Moloka'i bird was injured and turned into a rehab facility, where it laid a broken egg, and then it was transported to the Ki'i Unit of JCNWR, O'ahu, where it was released on 13 Dec 2016 and remained through the year. Juvenile Snow Geese usually travel in family groups with their parents through the first fall migration, which casts some doubt on the natural occurrence of this flock, but it is also difficult to understand why and how such a flock could be imported to Hawaii.

The Snow Goose is found in two distinct morphs; all records from Hawaii have been of white-morphed individuals. The specimen from O'ahu (BPBM 3154), an adult male, was identified as a Greater Snow Goose (*C.c. atlanticus*) by Engilis et al. (2004) but measurements (wing chord 426 mm, tail 124 mm, exposed culmen 86 mm, tarsus 86 mm; PP) indicate male Lesser Snow Goose (*C. c. caerulescens*) of central and western North America (*cf.* Udvardy 1961, Pyle 2008). Greater Snow Goose breeds in ne. Canada and migrates to the mid-Atlantic N American coast and may not be the expected subspecies to reach the Hawaii, although a record has also been reported for Japan (Engilis *et al.* 2004). The bird on Midway appeared large but most photographs and descriptions from Hawaii suggest smaller birds, probably pertaining to the more expected Lesser Snow Goose.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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