

**Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens***

The Snow Goose is a rare winter visitor to San Diego County with about 25 to 50 individuals occurring each year. Most of these associate with flocks of Canada Geese. The steady growth of the wintering population of the Snow Goose at the Salton Sea, and the explosive growth of the population rangewide, have hardly touched San Diego County.

**Winter:** The Snow Goose’s distribution in San Diego County is an echo of that of the Canada Goose. From 1997 to 2002 our higher numbers of the Snow Goose were usually near large flocks of Canada Geese: eight at Bonsall (E8) 14 December 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg), eight at Lake Hodges (K10) 15 February 2000 (G. Grantham), eight in San Dieguito Valley (M8) 5 February 1998 (P. A. Ginsburg), and 11 at Sweetwater Reservoir (S12) 16 December 2000 (P. Famolaro). The Snow Goose also occurs rarely in coastal wetlands, e.g., three in the Santa Margarita River estuary (G4) 27–29 January 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg), up to eight at San Elijo Lagoon (L7) 26 December 1999 (R. T. Patton), and two in the Tijuana River estuary (V10) 24 December 2000–13 January 2001 (H. L. Young). In southeastern San Diego County our only records were of two at the upper end of Lake Morena (S22) 5 December 1999 (R. and S. L. Breisch) and two at Jacumba (U28) 1–5 February 2000 (F. L. Unmack). In the Anza–Borrego Desert there are three records from Vallecito (M25), including one of a flock of 50, presumably spring migrants, 5 February 1975 (P. D. Jorgensen), and three from the Borrego Valley, including two at Borrego Springs (G24) 15 January 1999 (P. D. Ache) and seven flying over it 1 January 1991 (M. C. Jorgensen).

The Snow Goose does not use any site consistently. Though San Diego County’s six Christmas bird count circles encompass the county’s best Snow Goose habitat, no count gets the goose annually. The Rancho Santa Fe circle, including San Dieguito Valley, has the Snow Goose



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

most often, recording it on 18 of 22 counts 1980–2003. The Oceanside count, however, has had larger numbers, up to 59 on 26 December 1993.

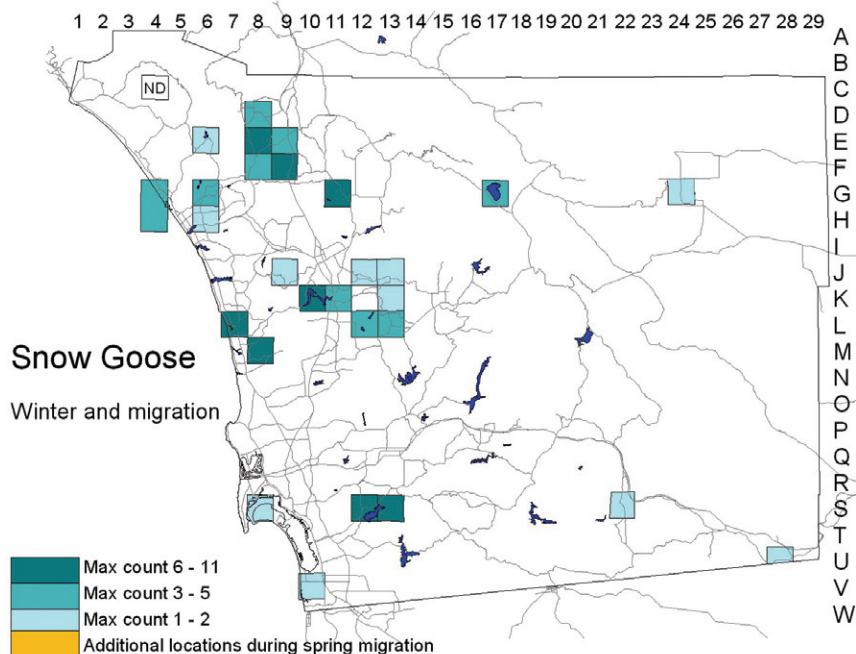
**Migration:** The Snow Goose occurs in San Diego County primarily from November to February. Two records for October (100 at Pauma Valley, E12, 4 October 1951, AFN 6:37, 1952; one at Corte Madera Lake, Q20/R20, 20 October 1929, SDNHM 12501) have not been paralleled recently. Spring departure takes place in February. Three were flying north over Fallbrook (D8) 16 February 1999 (M. Freda). The latest winter visitors were seven at Bonsall (E8) 25 February 2000 (P. A. Ginsburg) and three that departed Turner Lake (G11) 28 February 1998 (V. Dineen).

The only records of stragglers are of one at Jacumba 26 April–5 June 1964 (G. McCaskie) and one in the east basin of Buena Vista Lagoon (H6) 9 March–13 July 1999 (P. A. Ginsburg, J. Ginger).

**Conservation:** In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Snow Goose wintered in coastal southern California in immense numbers (Belding 1892). Uncontrolled hunting rapidly depleted the population, which apparently continued to dwindle gradually through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the second half, the population rebounded over much of the range, including the south end of the Salton Sea (Patten et al. 2003). But in San Diego County the species remained more or less stable at the current low level. King et al. (1987) detected a decrease at San Elijo Lagoon from 1973 to 1983. The birds shifted, becoming less frequent at Whelan Lake (G6) and Lake Henshaw (G17), their principal sites in the 1970s.

**Taxonomy:** The subspecies of the Snow Goose reaching California is the Lesser Snow Goose, *C. c. caerulescens* (Linnaeus, 1758). The blue morph has been recorded in San Diego County only once, a sighting of an adult with two immatures at Whelan Lake 3 December 1983–16 January 1984 (R. E. Webster, AB 38:357, 1984). The genus *Chen* is commonly merged with *Anser*.



**Snow Goose**  
Winter and migration