



Record Roundup of Ross's Geese

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On 31 July 2002, an Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources banding team working near Cape Henrietta Maria in Polar Bear Provincial Park captured 64 Ross's Geese and 6 Ross's x Lesser Snow Goose hybrids in two roundups. Over the next week of banding, 3120 Snow, 84 Ross's and 10 hybrid geese with obvious Ross's characteristics were captured. This was the largest number of Ross's Geese ever caught in Ontario and the one day total of 64 on 31 July ranks as a record for Ross's Geese seen or encountered in one day in Ontario. Moreover, 41 flightless adults and 43 goslings is the most evidence of breeding ever recorded in Ontario. During similar banding in 2000, we captured only 3 Ross's and 2 hybrids among 2122 total adults, and in 2001, we captured only 4 Ross's among 2278 total adults plus 5 young (one family).

Cape Henrietta Maria is southern Hudson Bay's largest nesting colony of Snow Geese, with about 200,000 pairs of Lesser Snow Geese, including an unknown number of Ross's Geese. Using these banding data, we made the crude estimate that roughly 280-360 pairs of Ross's Geese might have nested in Ontario in 2000-2001, but after our 2002 experience, the estimate may be as high as 2250 pairs. These estimates must be viewed cautiously. The variation between the 2000, 2001 and 2002 estimates may represent sampling error (e.g. such small capture samples from a very large colony that we may, by chance, have missed aggregations of Ross's Geese in the previous 2 years), or it may represent an anomalously high number of nesting Ross's Geese in 2002 (e.g. in this year of late snow melt and delayed migration of the millions of geese which pass through the Hudson Bay Lowland each spring; some may have decided to stay and nest rather than move on). In either case, the evidence of substantial nesting of Ross's Geese in Ontario is clear and documents a dramatic increase over the past 25 years; see Paul Prevett's 1987 account in the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas.

The banding crew included OFO's Jean Iron, MNR staff Lucy Brown, Jim Castle, Don Filliter, Tyler Muhly and the author. Banding is used to monitor survival, harvest and distribution of Snow Geese and is part of a continent wide program supported by the Canadian Wildlife Service, United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arctic Goose Joint Venture.

Although the Ross's Goose was once the rarest of North America's geese, its population has grown amazingly from 34,000 in 1966 to 805,000 in spring 1998. Once confined to the central Arctic and western U.S., it has now expanded into the eastern Arctic and mid-continent area as reported by Kelley, J.R., D.C. Duncan and D.R. Yparraguirre. 2001. *Distribution and Abundance in T.J. Moser, editor. The Status of Ross's geese. Arctic Goose Joint Venture Special Publication. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. and Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario.*



Flock of Ross's Geese on 31 July 2002 near Cape Henrietta Maria on the coast of Hudson Bay in Ontario. Photo by Ken Abraham.



Ken Abraham with two adult Ross's Geese and one gosling on 2 August 2002 on the coast of Hudson Bay in Ontario. Photo by Jean Iron.