



The Katharine Ordway  
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN  
No. 101

MACALESTER  
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

### SOLITARY SNOW GOOSE at ORDWAY.

It was a mid-morning early in October when I walked down the slight ravine which leads to the small pond at the edge of the property. Here was a delightful place to see and for ducks to enjoy - an acre-and-a-half of land-locked water surrounded by the oak forest and edged on the south by a small patch of cat-tail rushes ... and here the ducks were congregating as the days grew shorter and the inner drive was urging them into that restive period before they would speed southward for the winter.

I approached the pond stealthily, the better to observe the gathering groups of water-fowl and while some hundred meters or more distant I heard the strident proclamations of geese apparently "conversing". Almost immediately I was startled by a white apparition swimming upon the pond and since I had expected to find a few Canada geese my first reaction was that a swan had set down here and was perhaps being scolded by the geese. Closer approach caused the takeoff flight of a group of perhaps forty Wood Ducks and a handful of Baldpates but the Snow Goose - for that is what the white apparition proved to be - remained, swimming somewhat agitatedly in the middle of the pond. I looked in vain for Canada geese and indeed for another Snow Goose for I had convinced myself that there were several geese engaged in the loud honking. But there was only this single anserine swimmer resonantly honking its loud nasal call - half-expectantly, as if seeking a response.

The Snow Goose (Chen hyperborea) is noted for its strong nuptial bonds and it is further reputed to show mourning - or at least, great distress - for the loss of its mate. Whatever one can say, this species is certainly a gregarious one and it is so unusual to find one alone that one can almost say it is a crippled or ill bird whose functioning has been impaired by injury or disease. This bird manifested no signs of injury, indeed was very alert and active and well-coordinated; furthermore, the next day it had gone away leaving no evidence of its presence of demise - rejoining, I should think, the southward migration of its brethren.

So there remains in my mind the thought that this solitary white goose with the showy orange beak had very likely suffered a bereavement, perhaps nearby and had dropped in on the sylvan pond to summon its mate. Certainly its stentorian but unanswered calls were some evidence that it hoped for a response from the surroundings. Further conjecture would make one believe that the lone one, having despaired of any communication, continued its migration with a southbound group, perhaps to re-mate during the winter period.

R J CHRISTMAN,  
Naturalist

Jan. 4, 1982  
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