

# Snow Goose Migration

## Materials Needed:

Background discussion sheet, North America map, records and questions sheet

Time: 30 min

## Background:

The snow goose is a small migrating bird, typically white in color with black tips on its wings. There is a color variation where they exhibit blue-grey feathers with a white neck and head and are commonly called “blue geese”. This is a color morph within the same species. These birds nest in the arctic tundra in the Summer and Winter in Southern US and Mexico. They migrate following the snow line in order to continue to eat along their migration route when in the Central Flyway. Their diet is mostly plant based, including seeds, roots, leaves, grasses, and berries. In South Dakota, we hunt snow geese in the Spring and Fall. Typical hunts require lots of decoys and have very large bag limits.

## **Predators**

Nest predators (arctic fox)

Migration predators (coyotes and eagles)

## **The WHAT, WHERE, and WHEN of snow geese each year?**

Geese breed and nest (May and early June)

Goslings hatch (July)

Goslings can fly (End of August)

Migrate South (End of August through about December)

Winter (December and January)

Migrate North (January through May)

## **Population Trends**

5 million birds

Increase 300% since 1970

Increase 5% per year

The central flyway is increasing so fast that the birds going to the nesting grounds (tundra) are degrading their own habitat

## **How do we know this? Bird banding!**

Many species of bird are banded in North America. Bands are used to track movement, estimate survival, and estimate population size. When a band is located, either through harvest by a hunter or some other means, the finder will call the phone number stamped on the band and relay the serial number that is also stamped on the band. It typically doesn't take long to find out the approximate age of that bird and where it was when I was banded. Scientists gather all this information to estimate trends.



Procedure:

**You are now wildlife biologists**

You are being sent data regarding the banding and recovery locations of snow geese. Mark on the map the location of where the goose was found and where it was banded if applicable and connect the dots.

**RECORDS**

1. Snow geese harvested in Kansas on 11/24/17
2. Snow goose adults banded in Northwest Territories (Northern Canada) on 6/25/17
3. Snow goose goslings observed in Northern Manitoba (Central Canada) on 8/4/17
4. Snow geese observed flying high Northward over Oklahoma 3/20/18
5. Snow geese harvested in South Dakota on 10/13/17
6. Snow goose sitting on nest in Nunavut (Northern Canada) on 7/8/17
7. Snow goose banded in Northwest Territories on 6/20/15 was killed by an eagle in Texas. Farmer found it in his field on 12/30/17
8. Snow geese observed flying high Southward over South Dakota on 10/11/17
9. Snow goose banded in Manitoba on 7/29/13 harvested in Louisiana 1/12/18
10. Snow goose adults banded in Nunavut (Northern Canada) on 5/13/17

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**QUESTIONS**

Where do snow geese breed?

Where do snow geese winter?

Do they follow routes?

Why do they like South Dakota?

What are some hazards for migrating geese?

What can we do to help manage snow geese populations?

