



First published January 1, 2018

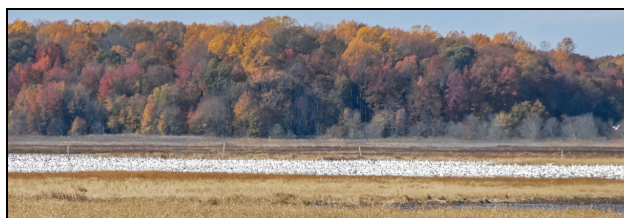


Not snowflakes, but Snow Geese filled the sky

BLIZZARD!

"It looks like a blizzard out there!" It was true; the dense early morning Florida fog obscured the Palm tree 10 feet from our back patio as well as everything around it and beyond. But that poor comparison to a blizzard whiteout was the extent of the similarity.

There was no wind-blown swirling snow; no bitter freezing cold; no eerie howling wind; no blanket of snow covering everything in sight; no piled up drifts against our doors blocking our ability to get outside; no shoveling sidewalks



and digging out cars from the snow piled on them by plows clearing the roads; and no closing of schools, stores, public buildings, and announcements of mandatory road restrictions for days until all was clear. Indeed, having spent winters in



Florida since 1999, I had to delve deep into my memory banks to recall how overwhelming blizzards are; but then I also recalled the warmth, coziness and comfort of the fireplace during the freezing forced downtime.

Sometimes enormous flocks of Snow Geese are called "Blizzards." Indeed, when the whole flock takes flight on their wintering grounds they can seem to whiten the sky. And one can understand why viewers would compare a large flock in a field to a snow bank. *(above, right)*

In my experience the flock doesn't let birders come very close, always walking hurriedly away from the camera in the car photography blind. *(left)* In this Snow Goose photo the grayer Snow Geese are juveniles; and the dark colored Snow Goose in the left foreground of the photo is a "Blue Goose," an uncommon color morph of the Snow Goose that at one time was considered a

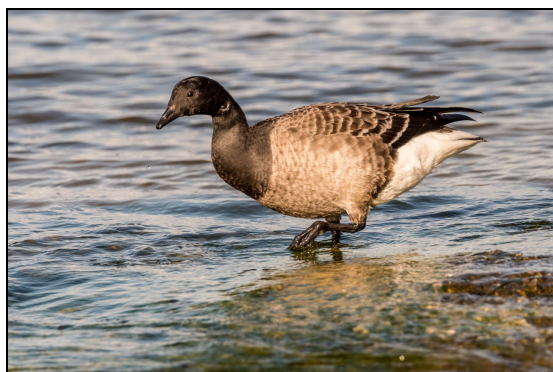
separate species. Snow Geese nest in the high Arctic and migrate south through all four of the North American flyways, with eastern migrants wintering along the mid-Atlantic coast, and only a few finding their way as far south as North Carolina. They are very rare in Florida, but a couple of reports of Snow Geese in Florida this winter inspired this column.

In fact there are apparently no native geese species inhabiting the entire Florida peninsula, of course discounting all the Canada Goose decoys on so many Florida ponds and small lakes that Double-crested Cormorants love to use as perches.

The southern extent of the Canada Goose winter range is the panhandle of Florida, and this Canada Goose photographed on the Vero Beach Wastewater Wetlands is the only one I have ever seen in Florida. *(right)* Even rarer in Florida is the Brant, a smaller high Arctic goose whose winter coastal range barely reaches the Outer Banks of North Carolina. When this one showed up for a few days



this fall on the eastern shore of the Indian River along A1A in Jensen Beach, it created quite a stir among birders. *(left, bathed in early morning sunlight)*



However, Florida does have a growing population of Egyptian Geese, which, in August 2014, was finally accepted by the American Birding Association (ABA) as a breeding countable species if seen in Florida. While they seem to prefer golf courses and public parks, this one found its way, one day only, to our condominium complex in Fort Pierce *(bottom of column)*; and this family, photographed in the town park of Sebastian, Florida, serves as proof that they are extending their range farther north from their home base in southern most Florida. *(below, right)*

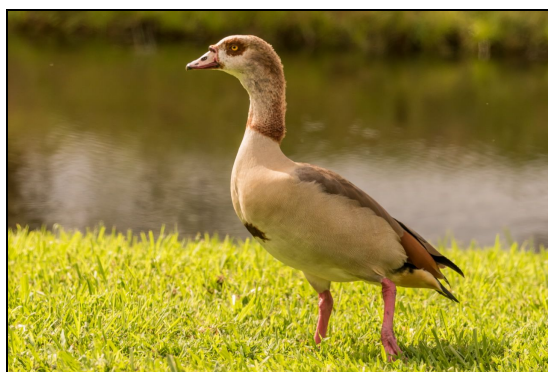
While many Florida "Snowbirds" are glad to escape the blizzards of the northern winters, we do miss the blizzards of Snow Geese which occur annually. And while they do not qualify in the same way as blizzards, the occasional winter invasions of Snowy Owls, (2014/15 and again this winter) do remind us of what exciting bird species we sometimes miss in the warmth and sunshine of winter in Florida.

But, we must also admit, the warmth and coziness of the fireplace did wear thin after a while against the relentless cold and misery of the real blizzard taking place outside. Therefore, we will continue to avoid blizzards by snow-birding in Florida each winter: both snow and bird blizzards. One gladly, one sadly.

Photo of Snow Goose (Blue morph) from ebird, at MINWR 11-13-2017 (seen 11-7 to 11-13-2017 only.)
ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40479078.

Canada Goose in Florida:
www.wec.ufl.edu/faculty/giulianob/Extension/UW24500.pdf

[Click for images of huge flocks of Snow Geese](#)





Click thumbnails to see larger versions