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LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

REPORT FORM

Species: Brant, *Branta bernicla* (immature?; race: *nigracans?* or *nigracans/hrota??*)

Number: one

Locality: Goose Bayou Road, Lacassine Rod and Gun Club, near blind # 7, Lacassine-Thornwell CBC.

Date: 12/17/99

Time: 1:35 to 1:45 p.m.

Reporter: David P. Muth, 1617 Charlton Dr., N.O., La. 70122

With Reporter: B. Mac Myers, John Sevenair

Other Observers: none

Light: good, sunny, bird was north of us

Optics: Zeiss Dialyt 7x42, Spacemaster 25 power scope

Distance: 75-100 yards

Duration: 1-2 minutes total, but bird was feeding, with head down, walking away from us, often hidden behind other geese or field rows, flushed later and seen a few seconds in flight.

Habitat: fallow, drained rice field, with first flush of new weedy growth

Behavior: feeding actively in company of Gr. White-fronted Geese

Description:

- Goose, smaller than Greater White-fronted Geese in direct comparison; about the size of small Canada Geese in same area, though shorter necked;
- head, throat, upper breast and back sooty dark brown;
- underparts (that were visible) including sides of lower breast and belly, dirty white, with brown;
- flanks whiter;

-undertail coverts white;
-neck with prominent white blaze on side; I could not see if blaze joined in front (bird never faced us), but this was my impression;
-in flight, uppertail pattern striking, very different from GWFG or CAGO (see sketch); white uppertail coverts nearly hid black tail, black "rump" feathers juttied into tail; pattern unlike u-shaped white of CAGO or GWFG. Some central white covert feathers may have been missing--I thought I saw black patch extending to point in field, and one photo in flight seems to show this;
-bill and legs black; bill stubby and legs short, compared to GWFG.

Voice: Not heard.

Similar Species:

None, really.

Discussion:

This bird was feeding very actively, bent over much of the time, often hidden by other geese, moving away from us, eventually hidden behind a dike. We were so close we could not get out of the car, so we were fiddling with scopes and Mac's camera, trying to see it better and get photos. I never clearly saw the bird head-on, and scoping with a hand-held spacemaster was less than satisfactory--so my details are very fuzzy on key points. Mac and I (using his camera) obtained distant photos, in which it can clearly be seen that the bird is a Brant. Other questions remain. I had a very clear impression of a *very* extensive white neck blaze. I can't be sure if the blazes met on the throat, but that was my impression. As to underparts, again, I *think* the belly was more likely dark than pale, but I can't be certain, and I can't quite tease that out of the photos. The flanks, it seems to me, brightened toward the rear, and the breast-belly contrast did not seem striking. All this probably suggest *nigracans*, but I'm just not certain, and I can't say I noticed a dark belly in flight. (Once the bird disappeared, we got out of the car and stalked it, but it took flight before we could see it on the ground, wherefore Mac snapped some flight photos. It landed again, we think, but as we continued stalking, hundreds of geese got up, and we could never re-locate it.)

The fact that it was sooty brown rather than black on the head suggests immaturity, but the strong white blaze suggests, for either race, maturity. One solution is that some authors state that the white blaze is acquired during the first winter while still in immature plumage. Don't know about the timing. I'll leave it to the committee to examine the photos and see what they can determine.

Photos: See Mac's report.

Previous Experience: Very limited in New Jersey and California.

Aids: National Geo that evening; numerous guides at home.

Circumstance of Description:

I took no notes in the field--Mac was scribbling while I, closest to the bird, tried to scope and photograph from inside the car. I scribbled notes over the next few days, copy attached.

Confidence Level:

I am certain of the identification, but uncertain of age, sub-species. The bird did not closely resemble any field guide illustration, but its size and shape, and, indeed, plumage, did not suggest hybridization. Perhaps those with more experience can do something with the photos.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David P. Muth", followed by a horizontal line.

David P. Muth

Date: December 29, 1999

COPY

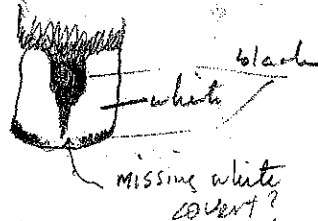
Brant

12-17-55

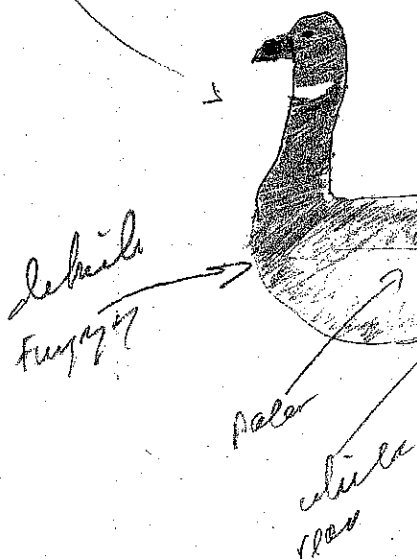
1335-45

Goose - smaller than GWF6 in direct comparison

- head and back very dark brown - sooty
- underparts, including sides of breast and flanks dirty white w/ brown
- undertail coverts white
- neck as head with prominent white blaze - could not see it
- blades joined in front, but this was my impression
- in flight - upper tail striking compared to GWF6
- bill and legs black -
- bill shaggy and legs short compared to GWF6



bird was feeding constantly - moving behind other geese - an eventually disappearing behind a dike - thereafter we saw it in flight after it flushed - never saw it head on - so could not see neck/breast. Coverts or it "nigraes" - am suspicious about the amount of white in blaze - it seemed a lot. On the other hand - head & neck were not quite black and breast and flanks looked about the same? Don't understand based on guide 1/20 year - Nat'l Geo -



- D Martin

12/17 & 18/55 - illustration improved later

**REPORT TO THE
LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE**

1. Common and scientific name:
Brant, *Branta bernicla*
2. Number of individuals seen, sexes, ages, general plumage, etc.
One bird
3. Locality:
To find the location, take LA route 14 west of the turnoff to the Lacassine NWR headquarters. Turn left on Goose Island Road and go almost all the way to the Lacassane Rod and Gun Club. Turn left, go until you see a corral on your right, and turn right. The road curves around to the left, and the bird was seen in a field to the left (north) of the road.
4. Date(s) when seen:
December 17, 1999.
5. Times of day when seen:
At about 1:35 PM
6. Reporting observer and address:
John P. Sevenair, 325 Stafford Place, New Orleans, LA 70124
7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also identified the bird:
David Muth, Mac Myers
8. Other observers who independently identified the bird:
I don't know of any.
9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and amount of light):
The bird was in the open and the light was good.
10. Optical equipment:
Zeiss 7x42 binoculars.
11. Distance to bird:
About a hundred yards
12. Duration of observation:
Approximately 5 minutes
13. Habitat (general and specific):
A dry, fallow rice field.
14. Behavior (flying, feeding, resting, etc.; include and stress any habits used in identification):
The bird was feeding with a flock that consisted of Greater White-fronted Geese with some Canada Geese. It walked along, mostly keeping its head down, until it walked up over a sort of levee in the field and disappeared from our sight.
15. Description (Include what was actually seen, not what should have been seen. Include if possible: total length; body bulk; shape, bill, eye, and leg characteristics; color and pattern of plumage, etc.
By its size and outline this was a goose, or at least a waterfowl. It was clearly smaller (maybe 20% smaller) than the specklebellies and Canada Geese it was associated with (which were similar in size to each other). It had a black head, neck, and upper breast, with a white mark on the side of the neck. This mark was much smaller, and placed lower, than the white cheek-patch of the Canada Goose. The back was brown.
16. Voice:
Not heard

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observations):
Canada Geese were eliminated by direct comparison--this bird had a markedly different pattern of black and white on the head, neck, and upper breast. Several other goose species have black-and-white heads, but they have even more white than the Canadas.
18. Photographs:
Mac Myers took some.
19. Previous experience with this species:
I've seen them in Rhode Island on several occasions, but it's been several years.
20. Aids: List books, illustrations, birders, etc. used in identification
a) At the time of observation:
David Muth recognized the bird first.
b) After observation:
The National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, third edition.
21. This description written from: x Notes made during observation; notes made after observation; x memory.
A copy of the notes is enclosed.
22. Are you positive of your identification? yes If not, explain:
23. Signature of reporter:
24. Date and time of writing this account:
The first draft of this account was finished at about 10:40 PM on January 3, 2000.
Some minor details were added on January 5.

Smaller than Speck, Can
White mark on neck
Black head, well down
in front
brown back

1:35 PM
Feeding in field - climbed
Goose I Rd. ^{assane} over barn
almost to Lac Rd + Gun,
L to corral, R
follow curve to L
on L.

LOUISIANA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE
REPORT FORM

- 1) Name: Brant *Brenta bernicla*
- 2) Number: one, adult?
- 3) Locality: Louisiana, Cameron Parish, east of the hunting lodge on Goose Lake Rd., between the signs for hunting blinds 6 and 7; between Goose Lake Rd. and Hwy 3056
- 4) Date: 17 December 1999 Thornwell/Laccasine CBC
- 5) Time 13:35
- 6) Reporting observer B. Mac Myers, III 5660 Ada Pl.-Rear Apt. New Orleans, LA 70124
- 7) Accompanying observers: David Muth and John Sevenair
- 8) Independent observers: none
- 9) Light conditions: very good; we were looking generally north, with the sun behind us
- 10) Optics: 10x40 Zeiss in good condition; also much of the time looking through camera with effective length of 600mm
- 11) Distance: about 125-150 yards, somewhat closer when we walked out and flushed the bird
- 12) Duration: ten minutes?
- 13) Habitat: rice field with low dikes, grown up with low grass
- 14) Behavior: walking, bending over feeding, flying
- 15) Description: Muth alerted me to a "ring-necked" goose, and as soon as I saw it I recognized it as a Brant. It was a generally dark goose, substantially smaller than the White-fronted Geese which it accompanied. No Canada Geese were in the flock, but there was a flock of Canadas and White-fronts a couple of hundred yards away. This bird was probably about the size of the Canadas (small ones-hutchinsii?), based on their sizes as compared to the White-fronteds. The bill was dark; the head, neck and breast were black or blackish, perhaps sooty black. On the sides of the upper neck there was a white mark shaped like an imprint from the edge of a round grill; that is, a slightly heavier partial crescent with finer lines extending from it. The flanks back to a point slightly posterior of

the legs were a smudgy gray brown, not nearly as dark as the breast or back. The dorsal surface (back, wings) was sooty. The undertail coverts and the flanks to the rear of the dark area were gleaming white. The legs were dark. I never had a good head-on view to see the color below the breast. I was looking through the camera almost the entire time the bird was in flight and can only say that the white area of the uppertail coverts/tail was conspicuously more extensive than on White-fronteds. The flanks seemed darker than illustrated for *hrota*, but I can't say anything about the belly. I have no experience with *hrota*, and perhaps this bird was within the range of that race, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was more like an intergrade.

16) Voice: not heard

17) Similar species: There really are no other species with the same color pattern as Brant. The combination of dark head, neck and breast with the odd white patches on the sides of the neck and the dark back, white undertail area and extensive white uppertail coverts is distinctive.

18) Photographs: I took several photos handheld of the bird at rest, then passed the camera to Muth who mounted it on the tripod (we were in the car this entire time) and shot several more. When we walked out toward the bird and flushed it, I obtained several flight shots. I am attaching the photos, and Muth is scanning a few to try to enlarge them.
12 photos attached.

19) Previous experience: I saw several hundred Brants of the *nigricans* race in Alaska in summer 1999, but I have no other experience with the species.

20) Aids: immediately after the observation we looked at Geo guide trying to figure out the race. Later I looked at Madge and Brun's *Waterfowl*, Godfrey's *Birds of Canada* and several other guides and picture books.

21) This description was made from notes taken in the field and from looking at the photographs.

22) I am positive it is a Brant, but I am not at all certain about its race.

23) Signature: *B. Mac. Meyer III*

24) This account was written 22 December 1999 at 19:21.