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## FIRST OBSERVATION OF SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens* IN KOPAČKI RIT NATURE PARK AND CROATIA

*Prvo pojavljivanje snježne guske Anser caerulescens u Parku prirode Kopački rit i u Hrvatskoj*

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### ABSTRACT

The first observation of the Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* in the Kopački Rit Nature Park and Croatia was recorded on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024, when a single individual was seen in a flock with Greylag Geese *Anser anser*. The same individual was probably recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at the Podunavlje fishpond, only 2.2 km away from the first sighting. We consider this individual to belong to the category of species that have escaped from captivity (E) or species that have established self-sustaining breeding populations in other countries, originally introduced by man (C).

The Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* is primarily a North American species that breeds in the Arctic tundra, from Alaska to Baffin Island in Canada, while in Europe, the species breeds entirely in northwestern Greenland (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2021). The European breeding population in Greenland is estimated at 1,000-5,000 pairs, equating to 2,000-10,000 mature individuals (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2021), and is increasing (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2024).

Non-native breeding populations in Europe, presumably originating from escapes from captivity, have been recorded in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, northwestern Germany, Finland, and northern Russia (KELLER *et al.* 2020). Non-breeding observations of vagrant individuals have been recorded in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, the Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2024).

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The Snow Goose breeds on low, grassy tundra or stony ground, generally near water (ponds, shallow lakes, or river deltas). During passage and wintering, it is present in agricultural fields and wetlands, associating with flocks of other goose species.

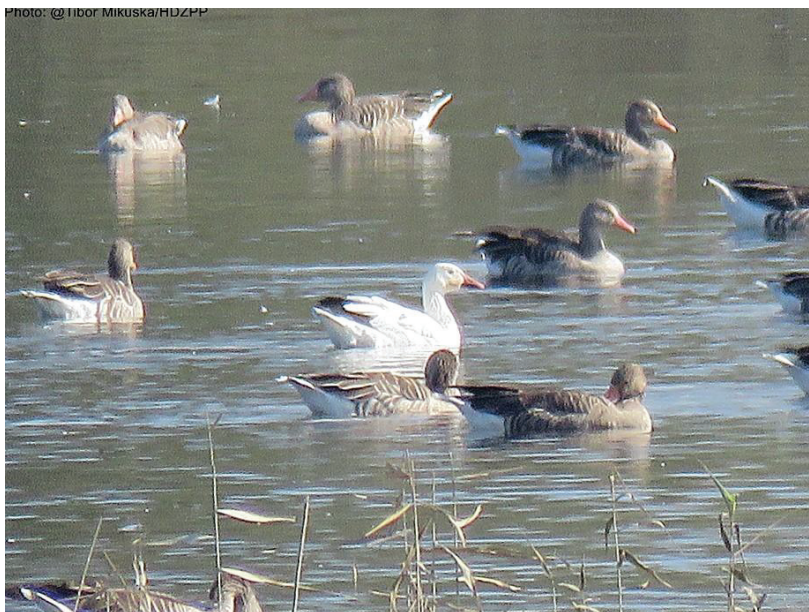
On World Migratory Bird Day, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024, a large flock of Greylag Geese *Anser anser* in Kopački rit Nature Park was disturbed by foraging White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*. As the geese flew overhead, a large, white goose was observed among them. Luckily, the flock landed in the floodplain near the dike along the Sakadaš-Podunavlje road (45.619857° N 18.807702° E), allowing closer observation and photography by the first author (Fig. 1 & 2). Using a spotting scope, the bird was identified as a white morph of the Snow Goose. Its distinctive black wing pattern (Fig. 2) ruled out domesticated geese *Anser anser f. domestica*, while the white form of much smaller Ross's Goose *Anser rossii* was excluded based on the size comparison with Greylag Geese. The bird exhibited natural behaviour, swimming and preening among the wild geese.

Presumably the same bird was resighted by the second and third authors on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at the Podunavlje fishponds (45.628161° N 18.834573° E), approximately 2.2 km northwest of the first observation, resting within a flock of Greylag Geese. This time, it was visible that the bird lacked any leg rings.

Although the bird exhibited natural behaviour, it is highly unlikely that it belongs to the native population. These sightings should therefore be treated as escape from captivity or as originating from the category C population in another country (AERC category C E).

Observations of the Snow Goose in the Carpathian basin are not uncommon. Between 1913 and 2013, 43 cases were reported, with 38 confirmed observations in Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, and Romania (<https://www.rarebirds.hu/>). These include two records from 1984, seven from the 1990 – 1997 period, three from 2005, 16 from 2012, four from 2013, two from 2014, and three from 2016 (<https://www.rarebirds.hu/>). All observations are grouped into 18 records of single or two individuals. The increase in observations during the 21<sup>st</sup> century is most likely related to the growing number of birdwatchers and improved equipment used for documenting observations of rare birds.

This is the first observation of Snow Goose in the Kopački rit Nature Park, expanding its list of non-native bird species to 11 (Mikuska *et al.* 2023). Furthermore, it is the first observation of this species in Croatia, increasing the national list of escapees and probable escapees (AERC categories C E, D, E) to 22 species (Tomik & Barišić 2024).



**Figure 1.** Snow goose *Anser caerulescens* among the Greylag geese *Anser anser*  
**Slika 1.** Snježna guska *Anser caerulescens* u jatu divljih gusaka *Anser anser*



**Figure 2.** Typical underwing pattern of the Snow goose, *Anser caerulescens*, white form  
**Slika 2.** Tipičan uzorak donjeg dijela krila snježne guske *Anser caerulescens*

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## SAŽETAK

Prvo pojavljivanje snježne guske *Anser caerulescens* u Parku prirode Kopački rit i u Hrvatskoj zabilježeno je 12. listopada 2024. godine kada je jedan primjerak viđen u jatu s divljim guskama *Anser anser*. Vjerojatno ista jedinka je zabilježena 15. listopada 2024. na ribnjaku Podunavlje, samo 2,2 km udaljena od prvog nalaza. Smatramo da ova jedinka pripada kategoriji sigurno odbjeglih ptica (E) ili vrsta koje su u drugim zemljama uspostavile samoodržive gnijezdeće populacije koje je izvorno unio čovjek (C).