



by Cindy Steele

## ***Honk, Honk: Geese at the Refuge!***

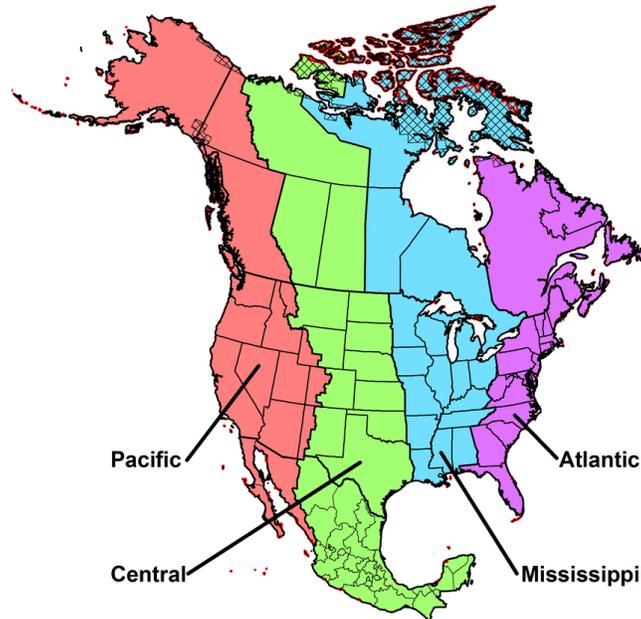
Welcome back to Puddles' Craft Corner. Honk, Honk! It's that time of year that we hear the sounds of thousands of migrating geese descending on Hagerman Wildlife Refuge! It's quite a sight to see! If you visit the refuge this month, you could easily see fields of thousands of geese



enjoying their winter meal. The arrival of our winter visitors has been described as geese, "descending like a prairie blizzard." The sound of their honk, honk, honking is almost deafening.

There are several species of geese who habitate the refuge during the winter months. Canada geese, snow geese, white-fronted geese, and Ross' geese use the refuge as stop-over and wintering grounds. Migratory birds by the thousands take up winter quarters at the refuge or refuel for long journeys. At times, as many as 10,000 geese can be seen in one field.

The geese that arrive at the refuge are traveling along the central flyway. These geese travel as far as 2,500 miles south in the fall and then travel another 2,500 miles back north in the spring.

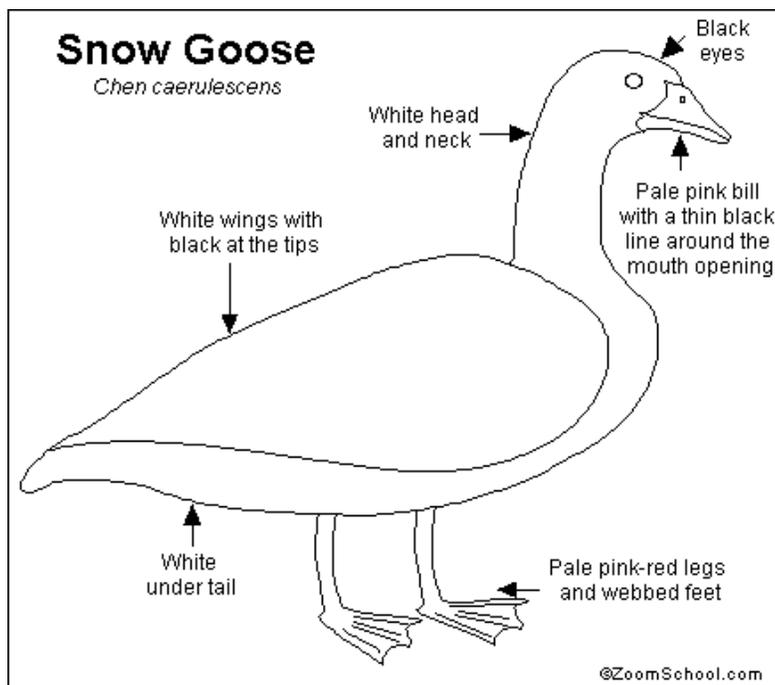


For the staff at Hagerman, preparing the 12,000-acre refuge for their visitors is a year-round job. The primary crop, winter wheat, is planted in late summer and September. This grain will be the main course for the many varieties of geese, ducks, and other water birds that come to the refuge each season.

With snow geese being one of the most prolific visitors to the refuge, we're going to focus on these beautiful creatures.



## What is a Snow Goose?



A snow goose is a species of geese that is native to the regions of North America. The snow goose is 25-33 inches in length with a wingspan of 54 inches. It has a black line on the edges of its orange-pink bill that makes it look like it is smiling! It has black wing tips, pink legs and feet, and black eyes. It has two color patterns. It can be white all over or bluish-gray with light brown underparts and a white head and neck. The bluish-gray snow goose is sometimes called the

blue goose and was once thought to be a separate species.

## **What Do Snow Geese Eat?**

The snow goose is a herbivore, which means it eats plants. It feeds in water-logged soil or shallow water and eats a variety of plant species and parts - from aquatic plants to grasses and grain. Some of their favorite foods include grasses, sedges, willows, rushes, and horsetails. Snow geese will eat all parts of a plant from seeds, leaves, and stems to



tubers and roots. They graze for seeds and grain above the ground and also grub around and rip up plants by the roots. In the winter, they feed on left-over grain and new shoots on farmland. The snow goose is a voracious eater. They have to be, food passes through their digestive system in only an hour or two!

## **Why Do Geese Fly in a V Formation?**

Why do geese fly in a V? Because it would be too hard to fly in an S! Just kidding. Scientists have determined that the V-shaped formation that geese use when migrating serves two important purposes:

First, it conserves their energy. Each bird flies slightly above the bird in front of them, resulting in a reduction of wind resistance. The birds take turns being in the front, falling back when they get tired. In this way, the geese can fly for a long time before they must stop for rest. The authors of a 2001 *Nature* article stated that pelicans that fly alone beat their wings more frequently and have higher heart rates than those that fly in formation. It follows that birds that fly in formation glide more often and reduce energy expenditure.

The second benefit to the V formation is that it is easy to keep track of every bird in the group. Flying in formation may assist with the communication and coordination within the group. Fighter pilots often use this formation for the same reason.



Snow Geese Flying in V Formation

### **How Do Geese Take Care of Each Other?**

When a goose gets sick or wounded, two other geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and provide protection. They stay with the sick or wounded member of the flock until it is able to fly again. Then they launch out again with another passing flock or try to catch up with their own.



## **How Do Snow Geese Communicate?**

Snow geese are extremely vocal and can be heard from long distances. The most common sound emitted by this species is the one-syllable honk, which is made by both males and females. Their flight call generally includes a series of shrill cries and high-pitched quacks which can be heard both during the day and night.

**[Click Here to Listen to Snow Geese](#)**

## **Fun Goose Facts!**

- A male goose is called a gander.
- A female is called a goose.
- A baby goose is called a gosling.
- A group of geese is called a gaggle. This is because when geese get together, they can get quite noisy and rowdy. They're only referred to as a gaggle when they're on land.
- When geese are flying in formation, they can be referred to as a skein.
- The Snow Goose's nest is a simple depression in the ground that is lined with grass and down (feathers).
- Females lay 4-7 creamy white eggs in each clutch (a set of eggs laid at one time).
- The oldest recorded snow goose was known to live for 27.5 years.
- The speed of these birds, in general, is 50 mph.
- The wingspan of both of the subspecies of snow geese is 53-65 in.
- When they are migrating, they tend to fly both during the day and night.

Puddles, the Blue Goose, is excited to share a fun craft about these beautiful birds! Hands-on activities are some of the best ways for kids to learn about something. Hands-on activities allow children to use their senses while learning. They see, touch, and move real objects to complete tasks. This means that science, nature, and more are amazingly brought to life! Children begin to understand the meaning behind what they are doing.

Now, let's gather up some simple materials to create our very own snow goose! Then, it's fun to spend a winter afternoon out at Hagerman refuge watching the geese while they're hanging out with us for a while.

## Flying Snow Goose Craft



### Materials

1. One white paper plate
2. One white plastic spoon
3. One piece of pink blush felt
4. Six or eight white feathers
5. Eight or ten white feathers with black tips  
(\*I just colored the tips with a black sharpie)
6. A black sharpie
7. Scissors
8. Glue

1. Gather all materials.



2. Fold the paper plate in half.



3. Cut the paper plate in half.



4. One side of the paper plate will be the snow goose's body.



5. Fold and cut the other part of the paper plate in half and then in half again to make the tail of the goose.



6. Now, you will use these two pieces for the goose's body and tail bases.



7. Glue the plastic spoon on the half piece of paper plate upside down. This makes the head and neck of the goose.



8. Draw black eyes on the spoon with the sharpie.



9. Glue the piece of blush pink felt onto the bowl of the spoon for the bill. Once the glue is dry and the felt is completely attached, trim around the spoon.



10. Now, it's time to draw on the nostril slits on the felt and draw the black line along the sides of the bill. The dark lines along the sides of the bill are often called the "grinning patch" because it makes the goose look like it's grinning.



11. Next, glue the tail piece of the paper plate on the bottom of the paper plate.



12. Glue the white feathers on the tail base.



13. Glue the black-tipped feathers on the sides of the goose's body to form the black-tipped snow goose wings.



14. Now, your snow goose is ready to fly up to Hagerman to spend the winter!



If you would like to take this one step further and learn more about wild turkeys while reading a charming children's book, here are some terrific books with beautiful artwork:

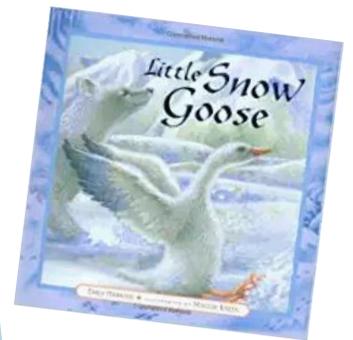
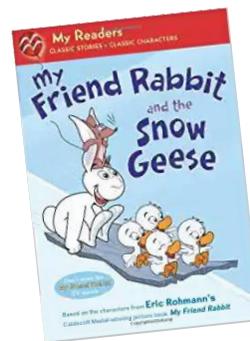
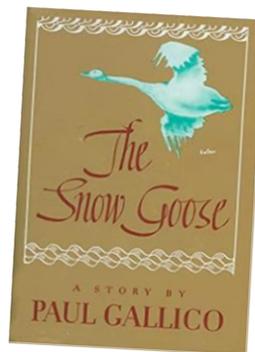
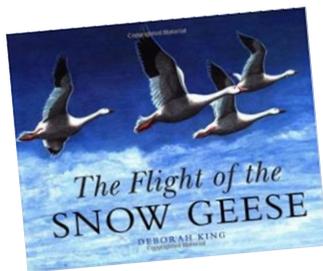
*Missuk's Snow Geese* by Anne Renaud

*The Flight of the Snow Geese* by Deborah King

*The Snow Goose* by Paul Gallico

*My Friend Rabbit and the Snow Geese* by Eric Rohmann

*Little Snow Goose* by Emily Hawkins



Puddles is excited for the wintertime at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is full of activity during the first month of the new year. Come back January to see a fun craft based on the animals spending these chilly days at Hagerman.