



An ID Guide to the Geese of Shetland



Branta leucopsis © Rob Fray

There are a number of different geese species that visit Shetland, the most common being the Greylag Goose which has become a resident species in recent years with a number of individuals staying into the spring and summer to breed. Geese species can be broadly split into two groups, the 'grey' geese species in the genus *Anser* and those within the *Branta* genus such as the Barnacle Goose. It can be very difficult to identify one species from another, especially the 'grey' geese which look very similar and are often seen in mixed flocks when on the ground. This guide will take you through each of the species detailing the main features that tell each one apart.

Resident

Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)

Most common species in Shetland often seen in large flocks in grassy fields. Large numbers over winter in the isles with some individuals staying on to breed in the spring.

Identifying features-

- Largest of the 'grey' geese
- Pink legs
- Large orange beak



L- 74-84 cm

Common Migrants

Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Most commonly seen passage migrant. Can pass over in flocks of a thousand or more in late September to early October. Few make landfall but those that do will often be spotted in amongst flocks of Greylags.

Identifying features-

- Smaller than a Greylag
- Pink legs
- Small, short, dark beak with a pink band
- Dark head and neck



L- 64-76 cm

Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)

Another common passage migrant which doesn't often make landfall. Peak numbers seen from end of September to early October but small numbers still seen into November. Occasionally large flocks of several hundred do land.

Identifying features-

- Medium sized
- White underbelly
- Black and white bars on upperparts
- Black neck with white face
- Small black beak



L- 58-70 cm

Scarce Visitors

White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*)

A winter visitor to Shetland, seen most years in numbers of 10-40 individuals.

Identifying features-

- Smaller than the Greylag
- Browner in colour

- prominent black patches on underbelly
- Bright orange legs
- Pinkish beak with a white blaze around the face



L- 64-78 cm

Tundra Bean Goose (*Anser serrirorstris*)

Very similar to the Taiga Bean Goose. Most noticeable difference is beak size and shape. Most commonly spotted in winter from November-March.

Identifying features-

- has a shorter, heavier bill and orange/yellow colouration is limited to a small band around the bill
- Orange legs
- Smaller than the Taiga Bean Goose, more similar in size to a Pink-footed Goose.



L- 53-70 cm

Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla*)

A very scarce migrant with only a handful of individuals each year. Can be split into two subspecies: Dark-bellied Brent Goose (B.b.bernicla) and the Pale-bellied Brent Goose (B.b.hrota).

Identifying features-

- Slightly smaller and browner than the Barnacle Goose
- Dark neck but no white on the face
- Two subspecies easily distinguishable by the either dark or pale underside.



L- 55-62 cm

Rare Visitors

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Introduced into the UK from America and now common in most of the UK but rare in Shetland. Most likely to be seen from April-June.

Identifying features-

- Large goose with long neck
- Brown in colour with black on the neck which doesn't extend onto the breast
- White patch on the head that does not extend up and over the eye.



L- 90-100 cm

Taiga Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis*)

A rare vagrant from Europe, range from one or two to zero records each year. Easily confused with the Tundra Bean Goose.

Identifying features-

- Beak is longer and slimmer than that of the Tundra

Bean Goose and the orange/yellow colouration runs over a larger proportion of the beak

- Orange legs
- Larger and a longer neck than the Tundra Bean Goose, similar in size to the Greylag.



L- 66-88 cm

Snow Goose (*Anser caerulascens*)

A very rare species in Shetland. Individuals arrive on occasion, but their true status is confused by the presence of a feral breeding population in other areas of the UK meaning we can never be sure if they are completely wild.

Identifying features-

- Medium sized goose
- Occur in two colour morphs:
 - White with black wing tips
 - Blue/grey body and wings with white head and tail tip.



L-65-75 cm

It should be noted that there are many local populations of domesticated geese around Shetland that may be spotted in fields and on lochs. As most domestic geese are thought to be descendants of the Greylag Goose, they are similar in appearance but will often have markings of white anywhere on their body/head.

Any records of goose sightings can be submitted to the Shetland Community Wildlife Group at shetlandcommunitywildlife@outlook.com or directly to the Shetland county recorder at recorder@shetlandbirdclub.co.uk If possible records should state:

- Date
- Species
- Number of Individuals
- Location
- Grid ref (not essential)
- Observer Name

Photographs are always welcomed and can be especially useful for evidencing rare and scarce species.

This project is supported by:

