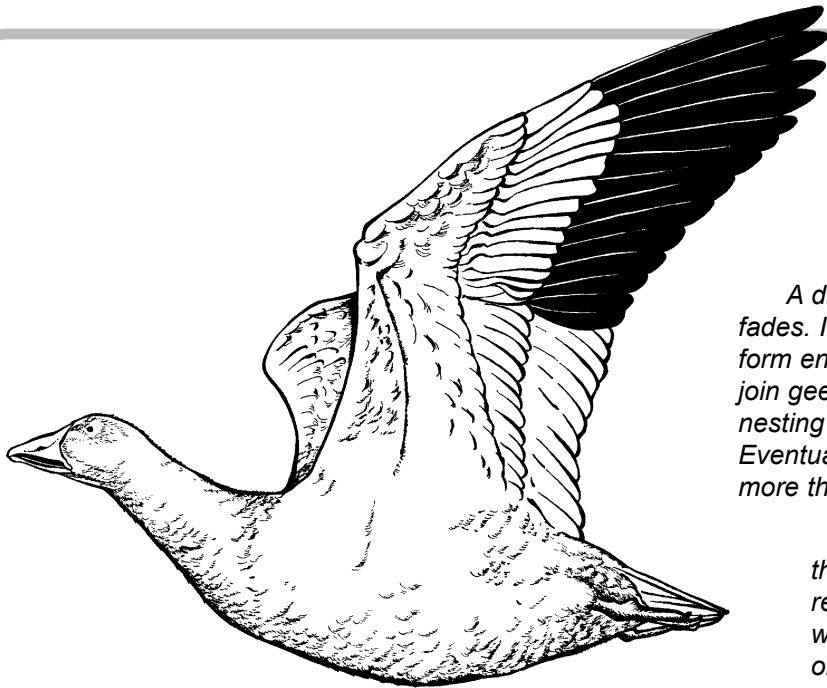


Flocking North



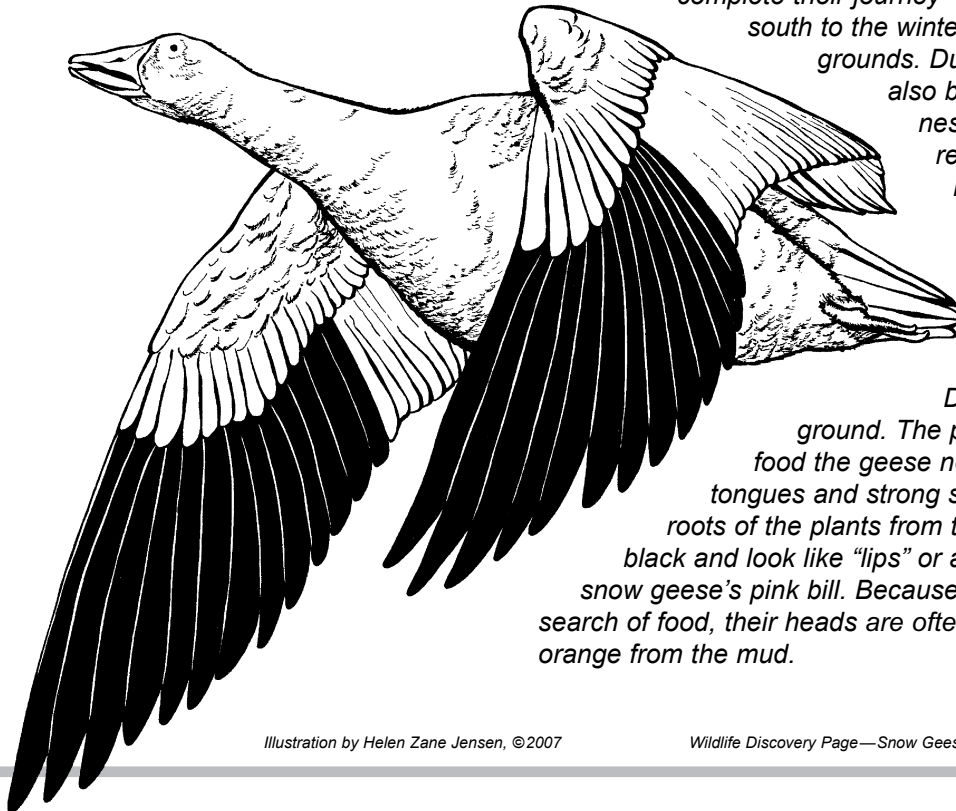
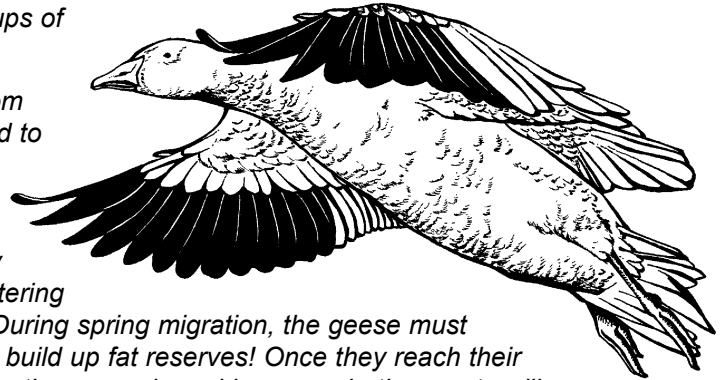
A distant rumble echoes above the plains. The roar increases. The sun's light fades. Is the sky falling? No, it's the annual spring snow geese migration! The geese form enormous flocks, as smaller groups from Mexico, Texas, New Mexico, and Kansas join geese in southeastern Colorado for the journey north. They are on their way to nesting grounds in the Alaska and Canada. Eventually, snow geese fly in groups of more than 10,000!

It's a long flight to or from the arctic! Snow geese need to rest and refuel along the way. In fall, snow geese only need enough food to complete their journey south to the wintering

grounds. During spring migration, the geese must also build up fat reserves! Once they reach their nesting grounds and lay eggs, both parents will remain at the nest until the goslings hatch. They will lose one-fifth of their body weight in their efforts to hatch and protect their young!

Winter and early spring are tough times for a bird to try to gain weight, especially complete vegetarians like snow geese. They feed on grain in farm fields and on wetland plants.

During winter, these plants are dried and dead above ground. The plants' roots are still very much alive and store the food the geese need. Snow geese have tough, jagged-edged tongues and strong saw-toothed bills to cut and tear the roots of the plants from the ground. The cutting edges are black and look like "lips" or a "grinning patch" or "smile" on the snow geese's pink bill. Because the geese constantly dig in search of food, their heads are often stained brown or rusty-orange from the mud.



Snow geese come in two different color phases or **morphs**. Most are pure white with black wing tips, pink legs and bill. The dark morph has a white head and neck, but has bluish-gray upperparts and is brownish underneath. Like all species, snow geese resemble one or both of their parents. If both parents are white, the young are always white. The offspring of a dark goose and a white goose or two dark geese will usually be dark.

