

2026



**MONTANA FISH,
WILDLIFE & PARKS**

Light Goose

Conservation Order Regulations



Highlights and Reminders

- **Hunters should be aware that there may be very few opportunities to harvest light geese in the spring in the Central Flyway due to very few birds being present or available.**
- Light goose conservation order opportunity only available in the Central Flyway (see map on page 4). Federal frameworks do not allow a conservation order in the Pacific Flyway.
- Season dates: March 1 through May 15, 2026.
- Legal species: Snow goose and Ross's goose.
- No daily bag or possession limits.
- Shooting hours: half-hour before sunrise to half-hour after sunset.
- Shotguns are not required to be plugged to a 3-shot capacity.
- Electronic calls not permitted (precluded by state law).
- Baiting is not permitted (precluded by federal and state laws).
- Lead shot is not permitted (precluded by federal law).
- License requirements: Only a free special light goose conservation order license is required. No other license is required. A federal "duck stamp" is not required.
- FWP will survey hunters who obtain a conservation order license. Hunters are required to provide harvest data including, participation, number of days hunted, and number of birds harvested during the light goose conservation order hunt period.

Regulations Adopted by Fish and Wildlife Commission

Regulations for season dates, structures, and restrictions were adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 17, 2025, under the authority granted in MCA 87-1-301 and are valid March 1, 2026, through May 15, 2026. The F&W Commission reserves the authority to amend the seasons, limits and regulations herein if deemed necessary for wildlife management purposes. Statutes and other information, including other agencies' restrictions, are provided as a courtesy and do not fall under commission authority. *Christy Clark, Director.*

Discrimination Prohibited – State and federal laws, Title VI of Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, or disability. Anyone believing he or she has been discriminated against (as described above) in any FWP program, activity, or facility may write to FWP Human Resources, 1420 East Sixth Avenue, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701 or the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW Washington, DC 20260. Any changes made to this printed publication can be found on the FWP website or by inquiring at any local FWP office.

Obtain a License

The free light goose conservation order license is available at all Fish, Wildlife & Parks offices, FWP Ambassadors throughout the state, and online at fwp.mt.gov. The free light goose conservation order license is the only license that is required for hunting during the light goose conservation order hunt period.

Hunter Survey Requirement: Per federal requirement participating hunters will be surveyed by FWP. Hunters are required to provide harvest data including, participation, number of days hunted, and number of birds harvested during the light goose conservation order hunt period.

Hunter Education

If you were born after January 1, 1985, you are required to show proof of completing a Montana hunter safety and education course (or an approved hunter safety course from any other state or province) prior to applying for or purchasing a hunting license as per MCA 87-2-105.

Youth Hunters – there are two ways to be a youth hunter:

1. An **Apprentice Hunter** is a resident or nonresident at least 10

years of age certified at an FWP office or online at fwp.mt.gov. This allows the apprentice to hunt some species, while accompanied by a mentor, without first completing a hunter education course. The Apprentice Hunter may not purchase a mountain lion, black bear, or wolf license, or apply for a bighorn sheep license or a hunting license or permit with a limited quota. The Apprentice Hunter may not purchase an elk license if he/she is under 15 years of age. Other restrictions apply. See our website for details at: fwp.mt.gov/hunt/education/apprentice-hunter.

2. A resident or nonresident youth 12-17 years of age may hunt any game species for which their license is valid. Those who will reach 12 years of age by Jan. 16, 2027, may hunt any game species, for which their license is valid, after Aug. 15 of the 2026 license year. Proof of hunter education must be presented at the time of purchase.

Laws & Rules

Statute denoted by MCA and Commission Rule denoted by CR

Baiting (CR) – Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 20.11 and 20.21(i). You cannot hunt waterfowl or any other migratory game bird by the aid of baiting or on or over any baited area where you know or reasonably should know that the area is or has been baited. Baiting is the direct or indirect placing, exposing, depositing, distributing, or scattering of salt, grain, or other feed that could lure or attract migratory game birds to, on, or over any areas where hunters are attempting to take them. A baited area is any area on which salt, grain, or other feed has been placed, exposed, deposited, distributed, or scattered, if that salt, grain, or feed could serve as a lure or attraction for migratory game birds.

The 10-Day Rule: A baited area remains off limits to hunting for 10 days after all salt, grain, or other feed has been completely removed. Waterfowl will habitually still be attracted to the same area even after the bait is gone. The 10-day rule recognizes that removing bait does not remove the lure created and that waterfowl will still be attracted to the area.

Boat Launching and Transporting (ARM 12.5.706, MCA Title 80, Chapter 7, Part 10) Transporting watercraft within Montana -

- STOP at all open inspection stations as directed by signs.
- When traveling west across the Continental Divide, watercraft must be inspected before launching. Boats with a ballast or bladder, such as wakeboard or wake-surfing boats, must obtain a hot-water decontamination before launching.

Transporting watercraft into Montana:

- Watercraft must be inspected before launching.
- Nonresident boats launching on Montana waters are required to purchase an AIS prevention pass. Go to fwp.mt.gov for more information. Motorized watercraft fee is \$30. Nonmotorized watercraft fee is \$10.
- Watercraft with a ballast or bladder, such as wakeboards or wake-surfing boats, that intend to launch on Montana waters must receive a hot-water decontamination prior to launching.

Hunter Harassment (MCA 87-6-215)

It is unlawful to:

- Intentionally interfere with the lawful taking of a wild animal
- Disturb an individual engaged in the lawful taking of a wild animal with intent to prevent the taking of the animal

Hunting Hours (CR) - Authorized shooting hours begin one half-hour before sunrise and end one half-hour after sunset each day of the hunting season unless otherwise stated in the regulations. See official sunrise-sunset tables on page 3 in these regulations.

Landowner Permission (MCA 87-6-415) - A person may not hunt or attempt to hunt furbearers, game animals, migratory game birds, nongame wildlife, predatory animals, upland game birds, or wolves while hunting on private property without first obtaining permission of the landowner, the lessee, or their agents. Regardless of whether the land is posted or not, hunters must have permission from the land owner, lessee, or their agent before hunting on private property.

For the purposes of this section, the term "hunt" has the same meaning as provided in **87-6-101** and includes entering private land to: (a) retrieve wildlife; or (b) access public land to hunt.

License and Permit Possession/Use (MCA 87-6-304)

It is unlawful to:

- Hunt or attempt to hunt for any migratory game bird unless the person is carrying the required license or permit at the time.

Method of Taking (CR) – Migratory birds may be taken only with long, recurve or compound bow and arrow, shotgun not larger than 10 gauge and fired from the shoulder, or by means of falconry.

You can hunt migratory game birds, including waterfowl, on, over, or from:

- Standing crops or flooded standing crops, including aquatic plants
- Standing, flooded, or manipulated natural vegetation
- Flooded harvested croplands
- Lands or areas where grains have been scattered solely as the result of a normal agricultural harvesting or normal agricultural post-harvest manipulation
- Lands or areas where top-sown seeds have been scattered solely as the result of a normal agricultural planting, or a planting for agricultural soil erosion control or post-mining land reclamation
- A blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with natural vegetation
- A blind or other place of concealment camouflaged with vegetation from agricultural crops, provided your use of such vegetation does not expose, deposit, distribute, or scatter grain or other feed. You should be aware that seeds or grains from such vegetation could create a baited area.
- Standing or flooded standing agricultural crops where grain is inadvertently scattered solely as the result of hunters entering or leaving the area, placing decoys, or retrieving downed birds. Hunters are cautioned that while conducting these activities, any intentional scattering of grains will create a baited area.

It is unlawful to hunt migratory game birds:

- With a trap, snare, net, rifle, pistol, swivel gun, shotgun larger than 10 gauge, punt gun, battery gun, machine gun, fish hook, poison, drug, explosive, or stupefying substance.
- From or by means, aid, or use of a sink box or any other type of low floating device, having a depression affording the hunter a means of concealment beneath the surface of the water
- By the use or aid of live birds as decoys; although not limited to, it shall be a violation of this paragraph for any person to take migratory waterfowl on an area where tame or captive live ducks or geese are present unless such birds are and have been for a period of 10 consecutive days prior to such taking, confined within an enclosure that substantially reduces the audibility of their calls and totally conceals such birds from the sight of wild migratory waterfowl.

Motorized Vehicles and Public Roadways (MCA 87-6-207, 403, and 406)

No person shall take migratory game birds:

- From or by means, aid, or use of any motor vehicle, motor-driven land conveyance, or aircraft of any kind
- From or by means of any motorboat or other craft having a motor attached, or any sailboat, unless the motor has been completely shut off and/or the sails furled, and its progress therefrom has ceased
- From or by means, aid, of any motor driven land, water, or air conveyance, or any sailboat used for the purpose of, or resulting in, the concentrating, driving, rallying, or stirring up of any migratory bird
- It is unlawful for anyone to hunt or attempt to hunt any game animal or game bird on, from, or across any public highway or the shoulder, berm, borrow pit, or right-of-way of any public highway (the entire width between the boundary lines of every publicly maintained way when any part thereof is open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel)

Nontoxic Shot (MCA 87-3-403 and MCA 87-6-410) - No person may take ducks, geese, swans, or coots while possessing shot (either in shot shells or as loose shot for muzzle loading) other than approved nontoxic shot. For a list of approved nontoxic shot, see: www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/hunting/nontoxic.php

Nontoxic shot is not required for wobbler migratory birds (sandhill crane, mourning dove, and snipe) except on national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas. However, it is unlawful for anyone to use or possess a shotgun shell or ammunition loaded with or containing other than federally approved nontoxic shot while hunting,

taking, or attempting to take ducks, geese, swans or coots. If hunters have specific questions regarding this regulation, please inquire at the local refuge office.

Possession Limit – No daily or possession limit is in place for the light goose conservation order hunt period.

Possession of Live Birds – Wounded birds reduced to possession shall be immediately killed.

Recorded Animal Sounds (MCA 87-6-401) - It is unlawful to use any recorded or electrically amplified bird or animal calls or sounds or imitations of bird or animal calls or sounds to assist in the hunting, taking, killing, or capturing of any wildlife except predatory animals, wolves, and those birds not protected by state or federal law.

Selling/Possession of Migratory Game Birds - Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 20.91. Any person may possess, purchase, sell, barter, or transport for the making of fishing flies, and for similar commercial uses the feathers of migratory waterfowl.

Exception: No person shall sell, barter, or offer to purchase, sell or barter for millinery or ornamental use the feathers or mounted specimens of migratory game birds.

Transporting Waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, Mourning Doves & Snipe –

•Species Identification Requirement (50 C.F.R. 20.43) – No person shall transport within the United States any migratory game birds, except doves and band-tailed pigeons, unless the head or one fully feathered wing remains attached to each such bird at all times while being transported from the place where taken until they have arrived at the personal abode of the possessor or a migratory bird preservation facility.

•Tagging (50 C.F.R. 20.37 and 20.37) – No person shall give, put, or leave any migratory birds at any place or in custody of another person unless the birds are tagged by the hunter with the following information: 1) the hunter's signature; 2) the hunter's address; 3) the total number of birds involved, by species; 4) the dates such birds were killed. Tagging is required if the birds are being transported by another person for the hunter, or if the birds have been left for cleaning, storage (including temporary storage), shipment, or taxidermy services.

•Shipping (50 C.F.R. 20.44) – No person shall ship migratory game birds unless the package is marked on the outside with: (1) the name and address of the person sending the birds, (2) the name and address of the person to whom the birds are being sent, and (3) the number of birds, by species, contained in the package.

Waste of Game (MCA 87-6-205) - No person shall kill or cripple any migratory game bird pursuant to this part without making a reasonable effort to retrieve the bird, and retain it in his/her actual custody. Under Montana law, it is unlawful to waste any part of a game bird suitable for food. For migratory birds, suitable for food means the breast meat.

Whooping Cranes – Whooping cranes are protected by law. It is unlawful to take or attempt to take this bird. If a whooping crane is sighted, please call 406-444-2612. For more information on distinguishing sandhill cranes and waterfowl from the protected, endangered whooping crane, go to: <https://fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/hunting/cranes.php>

Hunter Land Access

Hunters, it is your responsibility to know where you are, to know who owns the land, and to know what access restrictions apply.

Fishing Access Sites – Many of Montana's Fishing Access Sites (FAS) offer hunting opportunities, however, certain restrictions may apply such as no-hunting safety zones and/or restrictions on the type of hunting weapon or firearm that may be used. Refer to the Fishing Access Site website at <https://myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/explore> for site specific information, opportunities and restrictions.

Montana State Parks – Some of Montana's State Parks provide hunting opportunities; however, certain restrictions may apply, such as no-hunting safety zones and/or restrictions on the type of hunting weapon or firearm that may be used. Contact the specific park and/or refer to the Montana State Park website at <http://stateparks.mt.gov> for site specific information regarding hunting opportunities and restrictions.

Federal Land Access

• National Parks are closed to hunting.

• National Wildlife Refuges - More restrictive regulations may apply to national wildlife refuges or Federal Waterfowl Production Areas open

to public hunting. For additional information on federal regulations visit: www.fws.gov/refuges/refugeLocatorMaps/Montana or inquire at the local refuge office.

- For hunting opportunities on federal lands such as U.S. Forest Service or U.S. Bureau of Land Management, inquire at the local federal office.
- Access to public lands through private land requires permission of the private landowner, lessee, or their agent.

Indian Reservations – Hunters hunting migratory birds on Indian Reservations should check Indian Reservation regulations. State regulations apply to deeded land and the Bighorn River within the Crow Indian Reservation. The State of Montana and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have entered into a cooperative management agreement on the Flathead Reservation. Please check for migratory bird regulations specific to the Flathead Reservation. For information, call FWP at 406-752-5501 or the Tribes at 406-883-2888 ext 7200.

Railroad Access – Railroads and railroad rights-of-way are private property and may not be hunted without permission, nor should they be used as access to other lands (private or public) without explicit permission from the railroad. Consult the individual railroad for details.

State School Trust Lands - Additional information, including closures and restrictions, is available from the DNRC at 406-444-2074.

- A Conservation License provides hunters, anglers, and trappers access to lawfully accessible State School Trust lands for related activities during applicable seasons. Additional permitting is required through the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) for trapping on trust lands.
- Overnight use must not exceed the following limits: two consecutive days on leased land, 16 consecutive days within designated campgrounds or on unleased land.
- Motorized travel is only allowed on public roads or on roads designated as open. This restriction applies to all activity including game retrieval.
- Firearms may not be discharged upon trust lands within one-quarter mile of inhabited dwellings or outbuildings on state trust lands without permission of the inhabitant.
- Open fires are prohibited outside of fire pits within designated campgrounds.

State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) - See the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management-areas for more information.

Stream Access – Migratory game bird hunting between the ordinary high water marks of streams and rivers is lawful. However, landowner permission must be obtained to hunt or retrieve on private lands adjacent to waterways.

General Information

Duck Identification – Most FWP regional offices have free waterfowl ID guides. An electronic version of this guide (Waterfowl Identification in the Central Flyway) and other duck ID information, including a video guide to identifying ducks by wings, can be found at: <https://centralflyway.org/education/>

Reporting Banded Birds – Internet reporting of bird bands is encouraged and may be easily done by going to: www.reportband.gov. In most cases, you will quickly receive information on when and where a bird was banded.

Waterfowl Information – The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service site (<https://fws.gov/birds/index.php>) has links to information about waterfowl and other birds. In about mid-August, it will have the waterfowl status report.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Contacts	
Headquarters: Helena, MT	(406) 444-2535
Region 1: Kalispell	(406) 752-5501
Region 2: Missoula	(406) 542-5500
Region 3: Bozeman	(406) 577-7900
Region 4: Great Falls	(406) 454-5840
Region 5: Billings	(406) 247-2940
Region 6: Glasgow	(406) 228-3700
Region 7: Miles City	(406) 234-0900

2026 Sunrise-Sunset Tables for Determining Hunting Hours

These tables, including adjustments for daylight savings time, are the official sunrise-sunset tables adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Commission for hunting in Montana. Authorized hunting hours for the taking of light geese begin one-half-hour before sunrise and end one half-hour after sunset each day of the hunting season. (**Do not use other sources**).

ZONE 3: INCLUDES: Big Horn, Blaine, Carbon, Fergus, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, Musselshell, Petroleum, Phillips, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Wheatland and Yellowstone counties

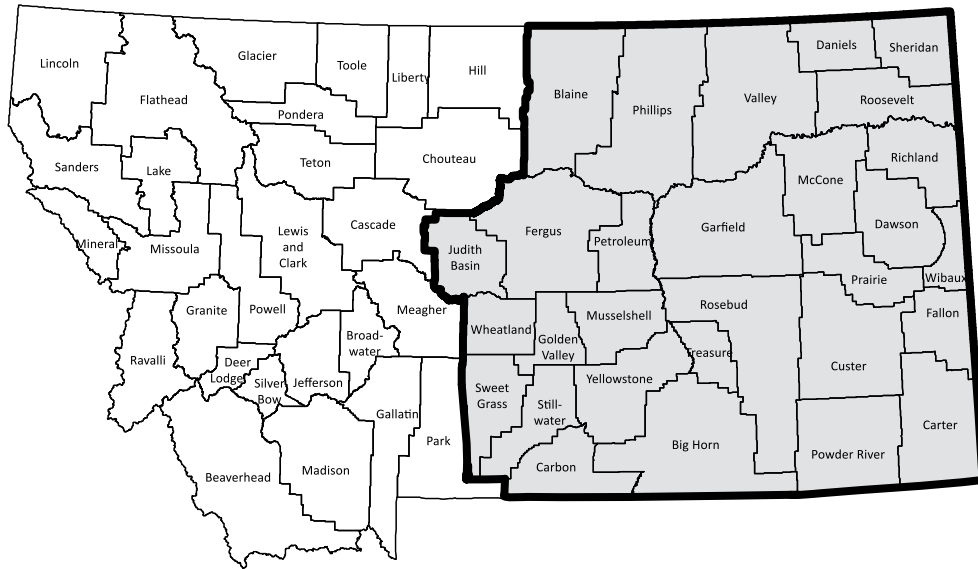
Day	Mar		Apr		May	
	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.
1	6:57	6:03	6:56	7:47	6:02	8:29
2	6:55	6:05	6:55	7:49	6:00	8:30
3	6:54	6:06	6:53	7:50	5:59	8:31
4	6:52	6:08	6:51	7:52	5:57	8:33
5	6:50	6:09	6:49	7:53	5:56	8:34
6	6:48	6:11	6:47	7:54	5:54	8:35
7	6:46	6:12	6:45	7:56	5:53	8:37
8	7:44	7:14	6:43	7:57	5:51	8:38
9	7:42	7:15	6:41	7:58	5:50	8:39
10	7:40	7:16	6:39	8:00	5:48	8:41
11	7:38	7:18	6:37	8:01	5:47	8:42
12	7:36	7:19	6:35	8:03	5:46	8:43
13	7:34	7:21	6:33	8:04	5:44	8:44
14	7:32	7:22	6:31	8:05	5:43	8:46
15	7:30	7:24	6:30	8:07	5:42	8:47
16	7:28	7:25	6:28	8:08	5:41	8:48
17	7:26	7:26	6:26	8:09	5:40	8:49
18	7:24	7:28	6:24	8:11	5:38	8:51
19	7:22	7:29	6:22	8:12	5:37	8:52
20	7:20	7:31	6:20	8:14	5:36	8:53
21	7:18	7:32	6:19	8:15	5:35	8:54
22	7:16	7:33	6:17	8:16	5:34	8:55
23	7:14	7:35	6:15	8:18	5:33	8:56
24	7:12	7:36	6:13	8:19	5:32	8:58
25	7:10	7:38	6:12	8:20	5:31	8:59
26	7:08	7:39	6:10	8:22	5:31	9:00
27	7:06	7:40	6:08	8:23	5:30	9:01
28	7:04	7:42	6:07	8:25	5:29	9:02
29	7:02	7:43	6:05	8:26	5:28	9:03
30	7:00	7:45	6:03	8:27	5:28	9:04
31	6:58	7:46	-	-	5:27	9:05

ZONE 4: INCLUDES: Carter, Custer, Daniels, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, McCone, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Roosevelt, Rosebud, Sheridan, Treasure, Valley and Wibaux counties

Day	Mar		Apr		May	
	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.	Rise A.M.	Set P.M.
1	6:42	5:50	6:43	7:32	5:49	8:13
2	6:40	5:51	6:41	7:34	5:47	8:14
3	6:39	5:52	6:39	7:35	5:46	8:15
4	6:37	5:54	6:37	7:36	5:44	8:16
5	6:35	5:55	6:35	7:38	5:43	8:18
6	6:33	5:57	6:33	7:39	5:42	8:19
7	6:31	5:58	6:31	7:40	5:40	8:20
8	7:29	7:00	6:29	7:42	5:39	8:22
9	7:27	7:01	6:27	7:43	5:37	8:23
10	7:25	7:02	6:25	7:45	5:36	8:24
11	7:23	7:04	6:24	7:46	5:35	8:25
12	7:22	7:05	6:22	7:47	5:33	8:27
13	7:20	7:06	6:20	7:49	5:32	8:28
14	7:18	7:08	6:18	7:50	5:31	8:29
15	7:16	7:09	6:16	7:51	5:30	8:30
16	7:14	7:11	6:14	7:53	5:29	8:32
17	7:12	7:12	6:13	7:54	5:27	8:33
18	7:10	7:13	6:11	7:55	5:26	8:34
19	7:08	7:15	6:09	7:57	5:25	8:35
20	7:06	7:16	6:07	7:58	5:24	8:36
21	7:04	7:18	6:05	7:59	5:23	8:37
22	7:02	7:19	6:04	8:01	5:22	8:39
23	7:00	7:20	6:02	8:02	5:21	8:40
24	6:58	7:22	6:00	8:03	5:20	8:41
25	6:56	7:23	5:59	8:05	5:19	8:42
26	6:54	7:24	5:57	8:06	5:19	8:43
27	6:52	7:26	5:55	8:07	5:18	8:44
28	6:50	7:27	5:54	8:09	5:17	8:45
29	6:48	7:28	5:52	8:10	5:16	8:46
30	6:47	7:30	5:51	8:11	5:16	8:47
31	6:45	7:31	-	-	5:15	8:48

Central Flyway

The Central Flyway includes Blaine, Fergus, Judith Basin, Wheatland, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, and Carbon counties and all counties lying east of these.



Central Flyway Light Goose Regulations

Species	Bag limit	Season dates	Additional Information
Greater and Lesser Snow Geese and Ross's geese	no daily bag or possession limits	March 1- May 15	Region 7 Closure: Treasure & Rosebud counties: Beginning at the junction of the Bighorn and Yellowstone rivers, then east down the Yellowstone River to the Rosebud-Custer county line, east of Hathaway, Montana (as posted). This closure shall be within the confines of the normal stream flow and shall include all islands, backwaters, and sandbars.

Lawful Species

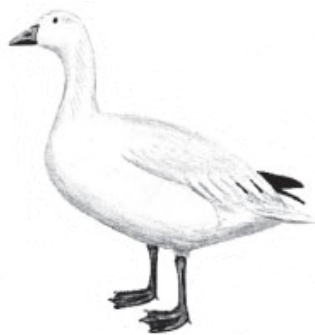
Snow Geese

- White with black wing tips
- Wingspan: 3 to 4 feet
- Rapid wingbeat
- Flocks of 20 to hundreds



Ross's Geese

- Similar to snow geese but smaller



Adult Snow Goose

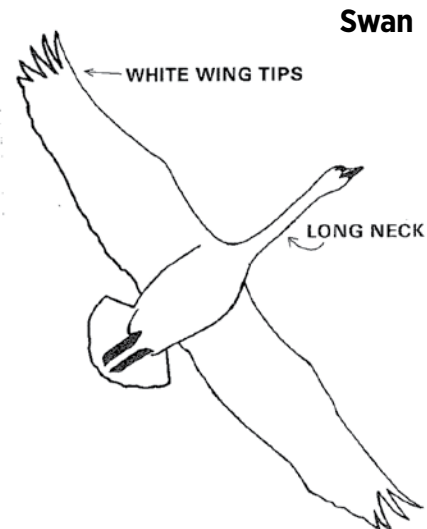


Immature Snow Goose

Unlawful Species

Swans

- Completely white (do not have black wing tips)
- Long neck
- Wingspan: over 6 feet
- Flocks of 2 to 10



Swan