

NESTING ECOLOGY OF TULE GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

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We studied the nesting ecology of Tule Greater White-fronted Geese at a newly located nesting area in the Susitna River Valley of south-central Alaska from 1994-1997. Little research has been conducted on boreal forest nesting geese and the only previous information on nesting Tule Geese is from Redoubt Bay, located approximately 120 km south-west of the mouth of the Susitna River on the west side of Cook Inlet. We located 31 nests by tracking radio-marked geese that had been captured and marked prior to spring migration. The entire known breeding range was systematically searched for radioed birds; and thus, determination of nesting habitat was unbiased relative to study area location/boundaries. Nest initiation occurred in mid-May, which is similar to dates reported for Tule Geese found nesting at Redoubt Bay in the late 70's and early 80's. Clutch size averaged 4.23 eggs/nest. Nesting success was poor during all years of the study, likely due to the high density of fur-bearers and bald eagles in the study area. The habitat of the upper Susitna River Valley is generally described as a black spruce and birch boreal forest interspersed with wetlands, as compared to that of Redoubt Bay, which is more characteristic of a high flood plain coastal wetland. Sites selected by geese for nesting were generally in association with these interspersed wetlands.

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