

A large flock of white-fronted geese is captured in flight against a warm, orange-hued sky at sunset or sunrise. The geese are silhouetted, showing their characteristic wing shapes and V-formation patterns. In the foreground, a line of reeds and water reflects the low sun, with more geese visible on the ground.

The Call of the Speck

White-fronted
geese bring a
song and a spirit
all their own

PHOTOS BY
GARY KRAMER

The yodel of a white-fronted goose is an oscillating, beautifully complex sound that's at once strange and lovely, particularly for those accustomed to the comparatively mundane honks and clucks of Canada geese. The sound lingers in the ears and the heart long after the chorus of vocal birds has ceased for the morning, too. You hear it on the drive home. While relaxing in a favorite chair. In your sleep.



A marketing guru might call the notes “on brand,” given that they pair nicely with the whitefront’s nature and striking good looks. The barred breast—the inspiration of the nickname “specklebelly,” which most every hunter prefers—looks as if an artist’s brush slid gently across each feathered stripe. The speckles first yield to shades of steel and copper and chocolate. Which begs the question: How is it possible that these colors seem a sensible match for the speck’s pink to pinkish orange bill? Yet somehow they superbly complement each other.

No matter where you encounter them—skimming frosty barley stubble in Saskatchewan, cruising over rice fields in Louisiana, or floating down against a horizon of flooded Arkansas timber—they are always a stomach-flipping-with-excitement sort of



treat. Adrenaline surges because, for most of us, a flock of white-fronted geese isn't an every-hunt occurrence; some fine eating is riding on our success, as specks are among the finest of wild game; and maybe we're nervous from past experiences—all those times when specks came teasingly close to finishing, then circled and circled maddeningly close to shotgun range

No goose seems to delight in busting us quite like a speck. But perhaps that's just part of the appeal, because from the challenge of hunting them to their handsome looks, the speck sings a tune all its own. ▲

Renowned photographer Gary Kramer's latest book, "Waterfowl of the World," is available at garykramer.net.

