

Canada goose
Branta canadensis

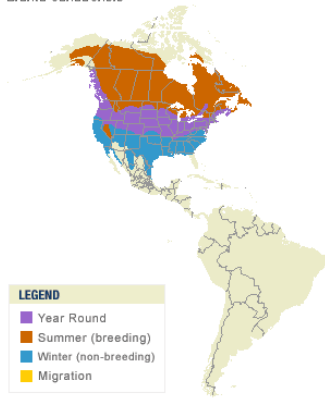
Identification:

Canada geese are common and familiar geese with black heads and white chinstraps, and subspecies are generally smaller as you move north. They can reach 20-25 lbs in size. The males (ganders) and the females (goose) are similar in appearance, and the goslings are yellow. And geese can live upwards of 20-30 years.



Natural history:

Canada Goose
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Loss of habitat and overhunting in the 1800's and early 1900's almost led to the extinction of the Canada goose. A small flock was rediscovered in 1962 in Minnesota. Major protections, breeding programs and reintroduction plans were incredibly successful and now they are considered a species of "least concern", meaning their population is large and stable. Colorado is a member of the Central and the Pacific Flyway Council, which manages migratory birds, including the Canada goose. The Flyway Councils work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) on migratory bird issues and hunting regulations. Regulations of waterfowl are more restrictive than many other birds, a link to hunting information can be found in the resources. In Denver it is illegal to discharge a firearm and hunting is not permitted.

Diet:

Canada geese are primarily herbivores, eating a variety of grasses and aquatic vegetation, although some insects, small fish or mollusks may be consumed. Grains can be a major food source during winter and migration when less green grass is available.

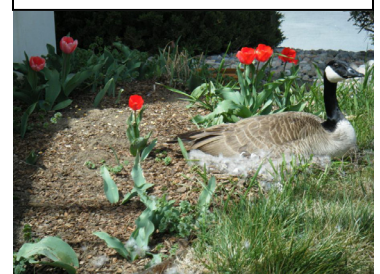
Breeding:

Geese mate for life and will stay together even outside of the nesting season. Nesting spots are chosen on an elevated spot with good visibility near water by the goose. Nesting occurs from mid-March through mid-May, with the goose laying one egg every other day, with an average clutch size of five eggs. The eggs are incubated for 28-30 days and the goslings typically hatch on the same day. The young cannot fly until they are two to three months old, and are watched over and can be vigorously defended by both parents. Parents will often return to the same nesting spot every year.

Behavior in an urban environment:

Traditional parks with large expanses of Kentucky blue grass lawns and open access to shallow lakes are unintentionally ideal and preferred goose habitat. They feed on the grass, have open views in all directions to watch for predators and have easy access to get on the water to escape from potential danger. "Resident" geese (that live here year round) vs migratory geese were bred and introduced into cities and never learned how to migrate. The tremendous amount of resources concentrated in parks encourages them to congregate in larger than normal numbers in relation to the size of the open space. Large amounts of goose droppings are considered a

Goose nesting in flower bed,
Photo by Linda Neely



nuisance to park users and can negatively impact water quality in city lakes. As geese become more habituated (used to) to people and human activity additional problems can arise. Habituated geese cross streets and can become injured or block traffic, they can approach people and establish nests in high activity areas such as parking lots or on personal property. Migration time, late fall through early spring, sees an increase in the population as large migratory flocks stop in parks on route to and from their winter and summer habitats (migratory geese nest in Canada and the northern most part of the United States and overwinter in the southern part of the U.S.). In especially mild winters some flocks may stay in the Denver area until spring migration back to Canada.

Ganders protect their nesting mate and goslings and may be threatening towards pets or people who come too close, which can cause concern in areas with a lot of human use. Dogs in particular can come in conflict with geese and the fine for a dog (or person) harming or killing a protected goose is \$15,000 per adult, chick or egg harmed. CDOW does offer training and permits to “oil” developing eggs to reduce the number of resident geese. Oiling disrupts egg development and the egg won’t hatch. When done correctly it minimizes disruption to the geese and can humanely help control the growth of the resident population and reduce environmental impacts and human conflict.

Benefits:

Geese are beautiful, highly visible and provide interesting wildlife watching right in many city parks. Park regulars can get to know individual pairs and flocks and follow their development and mating through the years. Geese, goslings and eggs are also a food source for other urban wildlife including raptors, foxes, and coyotes.

What to do when living with geese

Considerations & strategies for making area less attractive to geese:

1. Reduce available food (short, manicured lawns) and replace with taller grasses, ground covers, less foraging area.
 - a. Mow less often; geese prefer grasses shorter than 6 inches high.
 - b. Eliminate mowing
 - c. Reduce fertilizer use; geese prefer fertilized grass to unfertilized grass.
2. Eliminate or reduce ability of geese to walk from feeding areas directly in to the water (with barriers).
3. Don’t feed geese, human food is both an attractant, and a health hazard for the geese. Malnourished geese may not physically be healthy enough to migrate or leave area.
4. Plant vegetative barriers, reducing line of sight, access to water, access to foraging areas (lawns).
 - a. Plantings should be higher than 30 inches.
 - b. Plantings most effective at widths of greater than 20 feet.
 - c. Plantings may need to be fenced while they are being established.
 - d. Rock barriers can be used in conjunction with vegetative barriers-large boulders or several mid sized rocks can reduce visibility and be less attractive to walk on.
5. Fencing
 - a. At least 30 inches high with only small openings.
 - b. Most effective when used with vegetative barriers.
6. Hazing
 - a. Use devices that move erratically (pinwheels, metallic balloons or streamers) or noisemakers to startle them away.
 - i. Must be changed occasionally so animals don’t get used to them.

- ii. Projectiles are illegal in the City and County of Denver (slingshots, paint guns, BB guns etc)
7. Repellants can be applied to the grass to make it taste bad to the geese. Methyl anthranilate is safe to eat and can be applied to both grass and crops and geese don't like it. It is also used to flavor grape soda!
- a. Must be reapplied and can get expensive, use as a short term measure in conjunction with other long term options.

You must get a permit from the Colorado Division of Wildlife to remove any adults or goslings or disrupt an active nest. 303-291-7227

Lethal removal or relocation:

Why don't we "thin" out the numbers of geese?

1. Population sizes are resource dependant. If the amount of resources (food, water, shelter) remains the same, animals will quickly repopulate an area. Most geese complaints occur during winter migration, so new flocks are constantly moving in and out.
 - a. Lethal removal is a short term solution.
 - b. Relocation is also inefficient as geese can easily return to familiar areas; additionally it adds tremendous stress on the individuals and can be in noncompliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which protects birds.

Resources

Cornell lab of Ornithology, http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Canada_Goose/lifehistory

Colorado Division of Wildlife, <http://wildlife.state.co.us/Hunting/Waterfowl>

Wikipedia.org, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/canadagoose>

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, http://www.fws.gov/le/HuntFish/waterfowl_baiting.htm

Geesepeace, <http://www.geesepeace.org>

Grounds Maintenance Magazine, http://www.grounds-mag/mag/grounds_maintenance_canada_goose_wildlife