

RESIDENT CANADA GOOSE

Branta canadensis

Photo courtesy of Alan D. Wilson, Naturepicsonline.com.



Photo courtesy of Daniel Mayer.

Canada geese, also called “honkers” are the most abundant of all North American species of geese, with scientists estimating about 1 million in the Atlantic flyway population. Unlike its migratory cousin, the resident Canada goose nests and resides predominantly in the United States, and has become a permanent and problematic resident in suburban and urban communities.

SPECIES DESCRIPTION

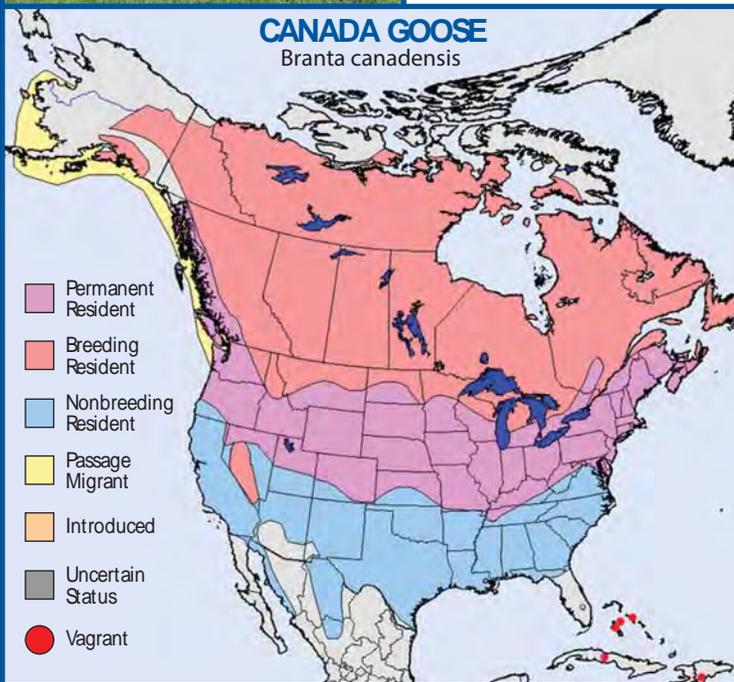
The Canada goose is a large water bird weighing up to 18 lbs (8 kg). It has a long neck, large body, large webbed feet, and a wide flat bill. Both sexes have a black head and neck with broad white cheek patches that extend from the throat to the rear of the eye. The breast, abdomen, and flanks are light gray to a dark chocolate brown. The back and tail are usually dark brown to black with a white “U”-shaped band on the rump. They are often seen in flight moving in V-shaped flocks.

NATIVE & INTRODUCED RANGES

Ancestors of the resident Canada goose used the Atlantic flyway to migrate from breeding grounds in Canada to wintering areas in the South. Individual geese began to take up residence along the way, extending their range throughout most of the United States and Canada. Strong reproducing populations exist all throughout Pennsylvania.

BIOLOGY & SPREAD

Canada geese are very mobile and can easily spread as they are willing and able to fly great distances to find food and nesting areas. By the early 1900s, Canada geese were nearly hunted to extinction, with no reports of nesting pairs in Pennsylvania before 1935. However, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act created protection for geese, and intensive relocation programs helped repopulate historic habitats. In the United States, breeding rates are higher than in Canada because there are less adverse weather conditions, such as late spring snow storms, that could impact nesting.



Map created by Terry Sohl, data from NatureServe.

CANADA
 GOOSE

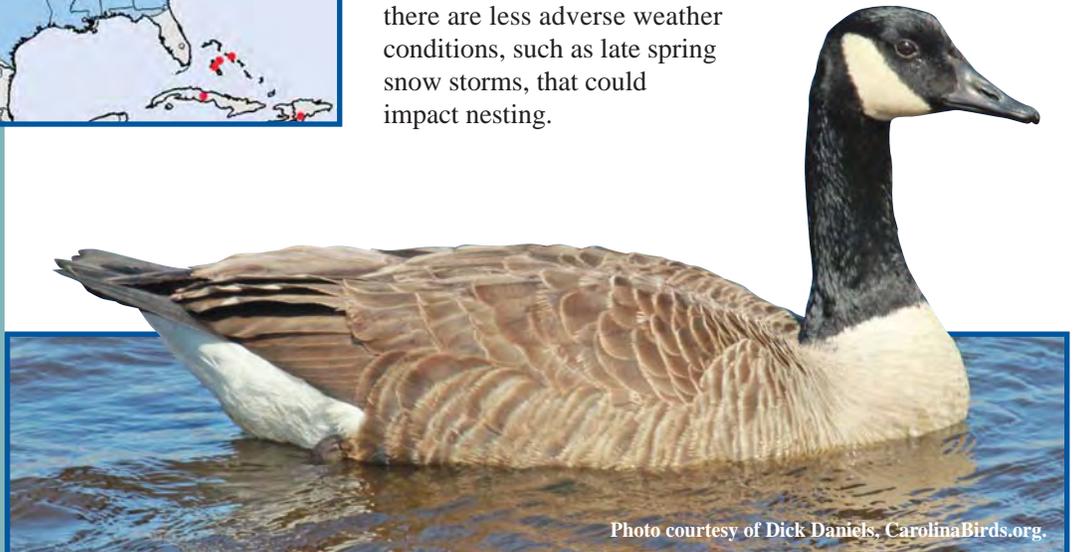


Photo courtesy of Dick Daniels, CarolinaBirds.org.

CANADA GOOSE



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

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Great Lakes RESTORATION

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HABITAT

There are a variety of habitats that are suitable for Canada geese, especially those that offer a wide open view, such as islands in rivers and lakes, marshes, reservoirs, artificial nesting structures, golf courses, and grassy fields near water.

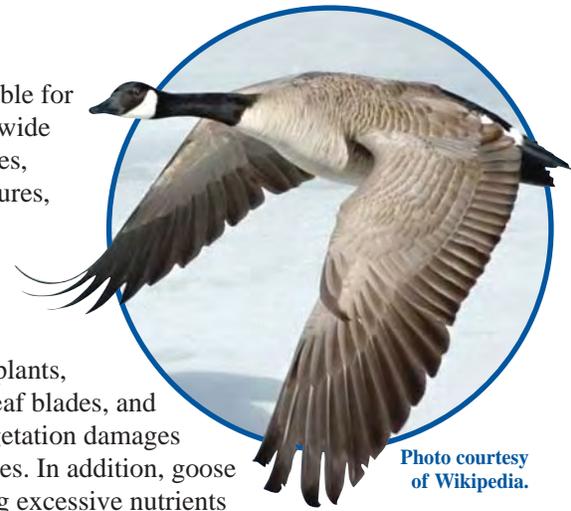


Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

IMPACTS

Threat to Biodiversity

Grazing geese feed on wild and cultivated plants, damaging rhizomes, roots, shoots, stems, leaf blades, and seeds. Grazing and trampling on native vegetation damages delicate wetland habitats and restoration sites. In addition, goose droppings can harm water quality by adding excessive nutrients to a water body and causing algal blooms.

Economic Costs

Complaints of Canada geese usually involve the accumulation of goose feces on lawns, walkways, private residences, schools, public parks, and other residential areas. Goose feces can damage property and reduce the aesthetic appeal of recreational use areas. Canada geese can also cause severe agricultural damage as they feed on cultivated crops like corn and wheat, reducing yield and increasing erosion. In addition, these large waterfowl pose flight safety hazards at airports where bird-aircraft strikes have occurred resulting in injuries, financial losses, and even loss of human life.

Health Risks

The presence of goose feces in residential areas poses serious health threats due to the presence of disease causing organisms. Furthermore, goose aggression, especially during the nesting season, has been known to cause human injury.

PREVENTION & CONTROL

Once established in an area, Canada geese are very persistent and management is difficult. One strategy used to deter geese from an area is to modify favorable habitat to include unpalatable vegetation, or allowing grass to grow tall to create a visual barrier between feeding areas and water. Barriers such as low fences are effective at keeping geese from lawns, especially during summer months when geese have molted and are unable to fly. Loud noises, geese-chasing dogs, or frightening methods such as helium balloons or scarecrows can be a convenient and inexpensive way to control geese; however, they can become accustomed to repetitious methods, especially if they realize there is no danger.

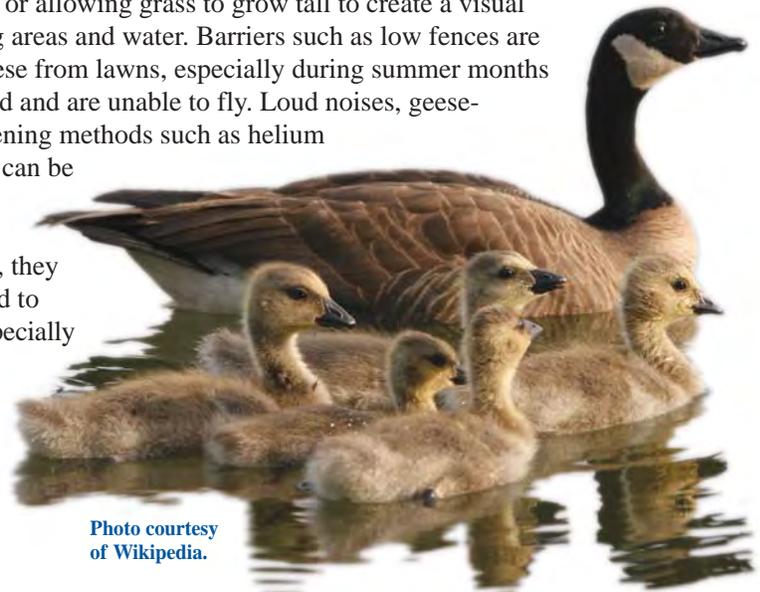


Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

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