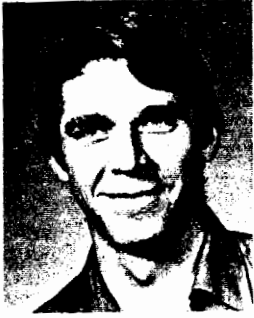


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Natural History Notes

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THE CANADA GOOSE

The Canada Goose is probably one of the most commonly known and widely recognized non-domestic animals in North America. Millions of people, both city and country folk, watch the geese announce the coming of spring as they migrate northward in great numbers. Just as they announce spring's arrival, they fly southward in the fall as winter nears.

There are at least ten subspecies of Canadian Geese, differing in both size and color. They breed in the spring in North America, from Labrador to Tennessee. They winter from central North America south where waters remain open all winter. Each spring, the geese return to their ancestral breeding grounds to raise a family. Their semi-annual migration is a sight to behold. Scientists are still not sure of the navigation mechanism used by these birds during their long journeys.

An adult Canada Goose weighs up to 18 pounds, is 3-1/2 feet long and has a wing spread well over five feet. It is identified by its black head and neck and broad white cheek. The upper portion of the body is grayish brown and light underneath. Each feather has light edging producing a barred appearance. The bill, legs and feet are dark gray to black.

Adults mate for life and lead exemplary family lives. Breeding begins when they are three years old. Males choose a mate and fight other males for her while they are still on the wintering grounds. The males will hiss loudly at an opponent. They will grab each other and beat their rival with powerful wings. When the female accepts the male, it is a permanent relationship.

No attempt is made to hide the bulky nest which is made of any available material and lined with plenty of down. The nest is always near water, usually on a muskrat house or boulder, sometimes in a tree. Six to 12 large buff-colored eggs are laid. After 28-30 days of incubation, the yellow goslings hatch. The female incubates the eggs while the male



stands guard. He is a very loyal father and will defend his family to the death. Canadian geese are very conscientious parents and lose relatively few young. Soon after the goslings hatch, they follow their mother to the water and start swimming. In the water, the female leads the family and the male takes up the rear guard. The young are able to fly 45 to 85 days after hatching. Like bay ducks, Canadian Geese run along the surface of the water to gain enough lift to fly. When they land, their webbed feet are used like water skis as they touch down.

The Canada Goose is a grazing bird, feeding on a tremendous variety of grasses. They are capable of doing great damage to farmers' crops. They usually feed early in the morning and late in the afternoon. They do eat insects, snails and crustaceans but animal matter is not a significant part of their diet.

Their average life span is 15 to 20 years, the record being 33 years. They fly 45 to 60 mph and faster with a tail wind. The "V" formation is a common sight during migration flights. The "V" is led by a male and the aerodynamics of it is such that the turbulence of the goose in front makes flight easier for the ones behind it. This indicates that the "V" flight pattern is an energy saving strategy during the long migration. Spring and fall wouldn't be the same without the familiar "oh-onk oh-onk" of the Canada Goose.