

This fact sheet was prepared by the Wildlife Rescue League. If you have a concern about wildlife in your backyard, contact the Wildlife Hotline at (703) 440-0800.



Canada Geese In Your Neighborhood

Aside from its beauty, grace, and intelligence, the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) has much to recommend it to nature lovers.

At the age of two to three years, they select a mate and stay with that mate for life. If something happens to the mate, they have a mourning period, then usually find another mate when mating season occurs. They are so devoted to each other that if one partner in a pair is unable to migrate, the mate returns year after year to join it during mating season.

Although generally sweet-natured, they are good and protective parents. If you are hissed at or attacked by a Canada Goose, most likely a father is upset that you have come too close to the nest.



There are only two ways to differentiate the male and female since their markings are identical. First, the male is larger. Second, the male makes a two syllable "ahonk" call, while the female makes a shorter, higher-pitched "hink" call like the barking of a small dog. Sometimes you will hear their alternate calls which sound like the seamless honking of a single bird.

Movements of the neck, wing, and body have distinct meanings around greetings, courting, and defense of territory from other males.

Coexistence With Humans

There are 10 subspecies of Canada Goose. The "giant" subspecies which is our most common resident in this area was actually considered to be extinct in the 1950s. This demonstrates how successfully Canada Geese have recovered! Yet their successful recovery has led to a backlash against them in many areas.

As development continues in our area, the addition of golf courses and man-made lakes invites the Canada Goose to a habitat perfect for it. Changes in climate and availability of natural foods have caused many geese to become year-round residents rather than seasonal visitors, and once a Canada Goose stops migrating, its offspring will not learn how to migrate.

Although there are many humane aversion techniques available, in many communities the approach to the "overpopulation" problem is slaughtering geese during the molt, when they are unable to fly. This only reduces the numbers temporarily, as the population will shift to what is now a prime and underused area. Additionally, the juveniles who are left alone when their parents are killed do not properly develop socially.

Should you feed them?

Feeding Canada Geese, or any animal, on a regular basis will encourage larger populations to develop. Populations should be tied to natural food sources. An occasional handout is a fine treat, or the feeding of an isolated or injured goose may be desirable. If you do feed, such commonly used foods as bread or popcorn do more harm than good. We recommend cracked corn or a commercial waterfowl mix available from a feed store.

What should you do if they build a nest in an inappropriate place?

Geese tend to build nests within sight of water, but not necessarily next to it. Unfortunately, this means on top of high rise buildings, inside fenced yards, or other places where the babies will be trapped when they hatch. The babies will not be able to eat until they reach water. When you see these nests being built, leave them alone but keep an eye open for the goslings hatching (about 28 days after the last egg is laid). Have several people prepared to assist the mother in leading the goslings to water. If you would like some tips on how to do this, call the wildlife hotline.

Can you help this injured goose?

There are a variety of conditions which look alike. Many times a nutritional deficiency called "angel wing" is mistaken for a broken wing. Geese frequently develop a limp, but eventually recover. If the goose can fly or swim away, it can be almost impossible to catch. Many times, once captured, there is little that can be done for an old injury.

If the wound is bleeding or infected, or if there is fishing line or other debris constricting blood flow, an effort should be made. Captured geese can do damage with their wings and feet, and should be approached carefully. If you are in doubt, call the wildlife hotline.

If you see geese or other animals being abused or maliciously injured, try to identify the abuser and call your local animal control officer or Humane Society.

***WRL is a non-profit organization.
Contact us at (703) 391-8625,
or write to:***

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***Visit our web site at:
www.wildliferescueleague.org***

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