

# The Canada Goose

*Branta canadensis*

## Goose Overview

**Type:** Waterfowl

**Native:** Yes

**Protected:** Yes

**Migration in Our Area:** Resident (year round) and  
Migratory (spring and fall) populations

**Lifespan:** 30+ years

**Diet:** Mainly Herbivorous

**Mate:** For life

**Nest:** Bowl lined with down. 5 eggs average

**Temperament:** Voracious eaters and aggressive when  
defending nests and young

**Habitat:** Urban areas, marshes, anywhere with water  
and food



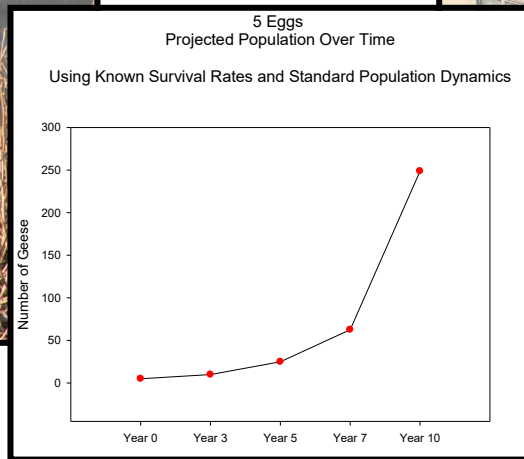
## General Biology

Canada geese are a species of large waterfowl native to North America. They are primarily herbivorous, feeding mainly on grass, fruit, nuts, and seeds. A single adult Canada goose can eat up to 3lbs of grass every single day and poop 1-2 pounds of that out! Goose droppings can contain numerous of diseases that can be transmitted to people and pets. Geese are incredibly adaptable birds and have learned to thrive in our urban environments. Manicured lawns, ornamental fruiting trees, and prevalent decorative and retention ponds create prime Canada goose habitat. The oldest known Canada Goose lived to be over 33 years old before she was shot. Geese choose a lifelong mate and begin nesting between 2-3 years of age. Both adults are very territorial and will aggressively defend nests and young. Young are precocious, meaning they can leave the nest and forage on their own immediately after nesting. Young become adult size and can fly within 4 months of hatching. Adults molt all flight feathers, and therefore cannot fly, in the summer coinciding with raising young.

There are 7 recognized subspecies of Canada goose and 4 subspecies of the closely related Cackling goose, many of which nearly went extinct in the 1950's and 60's. Like most native birds, Canada geese are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and cannot be harmed without a permit. Careful conservation efforts have allowed Canada geese to quickly rebound, leading to many populations being considered a nuisance today. The primary culprit for nuisance issues in our area is the Giant Canada goose subspecies. This is the largest subspecies and is non-migratory. These birds are resident in our area and stick close to where they were hatched all year long, only moving far enough to find safety, food, water, and nesting territory of their own. During spring and fall migration, many thousands of migrating geese stop over to rest and recoup during their migration south for the winter and north for the breeding season.

## Nesting

Nesting for Canada geese typically occurs between March and May. A pair will claim and defend a territory, aggressively attacking any intruders including people, pets, other birds, and even vehicles. They usually pick the same area every year nearby to where the geese themselves hatched. The female will build the nest by digging a shallow bowl. Nests are typically on the ground, but geese are also increasingly nesting on roofs, in planters, and even in trees. While most nests are found near water, geese have been known to nest a great distance away from the nearest water body, walking their brood up to 3 miles shortly after hatching. The female lays one egg every day and a half or so until the entire clutch is laid. Clutch size averages 5 eggs, but can vary widely, sometimes as few as one or as many as 15 eggs! Then she will line the nest with down from her own body and start incubating. Waiting to incubate until all eggs are laid allows all eggs to hatch at the same time, around 28 days after incubation begins. The female stays on the nest, leaving only rarely to drink.



## Management

Because of their incredible ability to adapt to our urban environments, a lack of natural predators, and their fiercely protective nature, goose populations are exploding around the country and coming into conflict with humans. Nuisance Canada geese are legally protected and must be managed with the care and respect all wild creatures deserve. An Integrated Management Program will include one or more of the following:

- ◆ **Canine, Laser, and/or Boat harassment**  
Scare birds into leaving the property
- ◆ **Nest Removal / Egg Depredation**  
Prevent exponential population growth
- ◆ **Flight Control Plus Chemical Deterrent**  
Remove food attractants by making grass unpalatable
- ◆ **Structural Exclusion and Deterrents**  
Prevent geese from accessing critical areas

