



FAST FACTS

Name: Canada goose
Scientific name: *Branta canadensis*

Average weight : 1.1 to 8 kg
Average wingspan : 127 to 173 cm

Did you know?

Canada geese nest in the same region their parents did, often in the same nest every year.

PHYSIOLOGY

Many people recognize the Canada goose by its distinctive black head, white cheeks, long, black neck and webbed feet. In general, the larger the bird means the longer the neck and the more its body is elongated. Scientists believe, however, that there are 11 confirmed subspecies of geese in Canada, and most differ in appearance. There is a large range in weight between the subspecies, from 1.1 kilograms for the cackling Canada goose to eight kilograms for the giant Canada goose. Wingspans also vary from 90 centimetres to two metres. The under parts for each subspecies can vary in colour, ranging from light pearl-grey to chestnut and blackish brown. Both male and female geese, however, look the same if they're of the same subspecies.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Canada geese can be found in most types of wetland. Although they are waterfowl, they spend as much time on land as they do in the water. In the spring and summer months, the geese eat leaves, flowers, stems, roots, seeds and berries. They will often eat for 12 hours or more a day to consume a sufficient amount of nutrients. They feed even more intensively right before they fly north after the winter, storing energy for an active breeding period and preparing for a lack of food in the spring. Canada geese can also be found grazing on lawns, in parks and on golf courses.

Canada geese normally migrate to southern agricultural areas for the winter. To do so, they fly in the distinct "V" pattern, where one goose is the leader and its flock follows behind in a v-shape. This helps the geese save energy when they migrate, benefit from the air currents passing the leader, permitting them to fly longer distances. The v-shape also allows for an easier coordination of the flock's movements, such as a change in flight speed or direction. The formation lets these changes be communicated quickly and efficiently to all geese in the flock.

When geese are flying in formation, you can often hear them calling to each other. Adult Canada geese have about 13 different calls, ranging from low clucks and murmurs communicated while feeding and loud greeting and alarm calls. Goslings even start to communicate with their parents while they're still in the egg. A gosling can make a call, or peep, if it's distressed or content.

RANGE

Canada geese breed all through North America, with the exception of the high Arctic and the extreme southern parts of the United States and Mexico. Some flocks winter in southern Canada, from British Columbia to southwestern Ontario to the Maritime provinces. They are only found in these areas if food and open water is available. Otherwise, the majority travel farther south to the United States, or even to northeastern Mexico.