

The Truth About the Canada Goose

Do Canada geese migrate?

The Giant Canada goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) found in Indiana does not complete the traditional fall migration; it often migrates only a short distance. Because of this they are seen throughout Indiana all year.



Why is the Canada goose population so large?

Canada geese were in decline at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of unregulated hunting. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 established regular hunting seasons, but by 1962 the drainage of wetlands brought them to the brink of extinction in the eastern United States. Efforts by conservationists helped to re-establish Canada goose populations. Within the past 20 years Indiana's Canada goose population has grown

to almost 120,000 birds. The increase in small urban and suburban retention ponds, the high reproductive success and the low mortality of the Canada goose subspecies found in Indiana all contribute to the growing population size.

Goose Facts

There are 11 different subspecies of the Canada goose. The most distinguishing feature among these subspecies is size. The Giant Canada goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) found in Indiana is the largest of these. It also has light-colored breast feathers, white flecks on the head, larger bill size and longer legs than other subspecies.

The average weight of the Giant Canada goose is about 12 pounds. Males are slightly larger than females.

Canada geese mate for life. If one partner dies, a new pair bond is usually established.

The female incubates the eggs for 25-30 days, then both the male and female care for the goslings.

Goslings are usually capable of flight about 71 days after hatching.

For more information about the Giant Canada goose, visit the Indiana Division of Fish & Wildlife Life Series page on the web at www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/publications/liferies/life.htm.



Why is the large population a problem?

There are several issues with large populations of Canada geese. As with any species that exceeds its habitat needs, overgrazing for food and nesting materials can seriously affect the vegetation in an area.

Because humans and Canada geese frequent the same places (beaches, shorelines, lakes, etc.) there are sometimes conflicts. During breeding season the adults become very aggressive and have been known to attack humans in order to protect their nests and goslings (baby geese). Geese also leave large quantities of feces and molted feathers, which are considered health risks to humans.

Is the Canada goose still a protected animal?

Yes, the Canada goose is still federally protected. What this means is that Canada geese can only be hunted during specified hunting seasons and within specified hunting parameters. During breeding season, a registration number from the website of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must be obtained in order to disturb any Canada goose nests. It is important to note that it is considered a federal crime with severe penalties to disturb a goose nest or to break or remove eggs without this registration number.

What methods can be used to control the Canada goose population?

There are several methods being used today. Effective control of goose populations usually requires a combination of several methods.

- **End the hand-feeding of geese.** Property visitors feed bread crumbs and other human food to the geese. The Canada goose's natural diet includes seeds, plants and insects, and human food is not a healthy substitute. Hand

Control methods (continued)

feeding encourages the geese to stay in one place and it also causes them to grow accustomed to human interaction. Not only is this dangerous to the geese, but it could result in more aggressive and harmful behavior by the geese towards humans.



- **Use chemical repellents.** These are used in areas that tend to be highly populated by humans, such as grassy picnic areas. This method is used as a last resort because it does not last long and is very expensive.
- **Scare the geese.** This technique uses instruments such as screamers, blanks and alarms that make a loud noise to disturb grazing flocks of geese. Audiotapes that repeat goose distress calls are also used.
- **Create barriers.** Allow grass to grow to a height of 30 inches for 20-30 feet out from the edges of ponds or lakes, since geese prefer nice short grass for grazing. Plant shrubs along the lake's edges. Post strings or snow fencing along a shoreline to discourage geese from entering the water.
- **Remove nesting materials.** While geese are in the nest-building process, removing the nesting material on a daily basis can discourage them from building on a particular site. Once again, the Canada goose is a federally protected bird and it is a federal offense to disturb a nest has eggs unless you have a federal registration number from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that allows you to do so.
- **Destroy eggs.** This requires a federal registration number. Several methods can be used in egg destruction. Oiling the eggs with corn oil disrupts the gas flow into and out of the egg and destroys the embryo. Shaking the eggs breaks the yolk and destroys the embryo. With either method, the eggs are placed back in the nest and the geese do not realize the embryo has been destroyed. They continue to incubate the eggs. Breaking eggs eliminates that single brood, but only encourages the geese to re-nest and lay new eggs.
- **Regulated hunting.** There is an early hunting season for Canada geese that typically runs from September 1-15. Canada geese can also be hunted in compliance with state and federal regulations during regular waterfowl season in November-December. Specific dates for this season vary annually. In a typical hunting season, Indiana hunters take approximately 25,000 geese.

For more information about ways to control Canada geese populations on your property or in your community, visit the Division of Fish and Wildlife's website at www.IN.gov/dnr/fishwild/hunt/geese.

Are Canada geese hunted on Indiana DNR properties?

Hunting is not allowed on state park properties except during special reduction hunts established by emergency order of the Indiana DNR Director. However, Canada goose hunting is allowed during established hunting seasons at properties operated by the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife and on the nine state reservoirs operated by the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs.

What Can I Do to Help?

- Don't feed our Canada geese!
- Enjoy watching and listening to the geese, but realize that an overpopulation can impact human health and wildlife habitat.

DNR

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