



Canada Geese

Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are a valuable natural resource and the sight of their distinctive V-formation overhead always brings a special thrill, and their calls herald the changing seasons. Migratory populations have made a fantastic comeback since their near disappearance in the 1700s, thanks to conservation efforts. However, since the first nest was recorded in Rhode Island in 1958, flocks of local-nesting or “resident” geese have become year-round inhabitants. Sprawling lawns adjacent to waterways, supplemental feeding and a lack of natural predators have allowed resident populations to become established and increase drastically since their arrival. Managing our populations through hunting and discouraging illegal feeding will help maintain a beneficial and healthy resident goose population.

LIFE HISTORY

Range and Habitat: Both migratory and resident Canada geese can be found throughout the United States and Canada. Some populations of migratory geese travel from their breeding grounds in the arctic down to the southern states for the winter, while others only migrate locally. Canada geese from the North Atlantic population call Rhode Island home during the winter, while resident geese utilize ponds, streams, bays, fields, or other open landscapes year-round.

Behavior: During their annual molt, when geese lose and regrow their flight feathers in the early summer, they congregate at ponds or lakes that provide a safe place to rest adjacent to a food source. After the molt and throughout the fall, geese gradually increase the distance of their feeding flights and are more likely to be found in open areas such as lawns, golf courses or corn fields, which offer a plentiful food source and clear view of approaching predators. Around October,

when smaller ponds freeze over, resident geese move to open water in Narragansett Bay or coastal areas and are joined by the arriving migratory populations.

Canada geese are large birds and will defend their nest if approached during the nesting season. Feeding geese can cause them to become unafraid of humans and lead to human-wildlife conflict that is otherwise avoidable. Aside from these circumstances, geese are typically not aggressive and will avoid interacting with humans.

Food Habits: Canada geese change their diet based on the season. In the winter they feed on berries, seeds, and corn fields. In the warmer months, they consume more grasses, grazing on lawns or utilizing their long necks to reach submerged aquatic vegetation.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Rhode Island has both migratory geese that visit seasonally and resident geese that remain year-round.
- One bird banded by the DFW in 1973 was reported as harvested 25 years later, during the 1998 RI goose season.
- A female goose could potentially produce more than 50 young over her lifetime.
- Geese pair for life, but if their mate dies, they will find a new mate.
- A single Canada goose produces a pound of droppings a day.

Reproduction: The annual life cycle for Canada geese begins in late winter when adult pairs return to nesting areas in late February or March, as ice cover disappears. Geese begin breeding in their third spring and they typically nest every year for the remainder of their lives. In the early spring, females build large nests on the ground, made from feathers, grasses and other plant material, in an elevated area close to water. After laying around 6 eggs, the female incubates while the male defends the nest, until the eggs hatch in late April or early May. Goslings are precocial and hatch covered in down with eyes open; they only remain in the nest for 1 to 2 days. Young become free-flying birds in the fall and can remain with their family group for up to a year.

Disease: As with other waterfowl, Canada geese can carry [Avian Influenza](#) and other diseases. Feeding waterfowl increases the risk for disease transfer. **Never feed wildlife, it is harmful to both humans and wildlife.**

REGULATORY STATUS

Geese are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. “The Migratory Bird Treaty Act makes it illegal to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid Federal permit.”

Rhode Island divides its Canada goose hunting season into three “windows.” During the “early” and “late” seasons, the goal is to provide hunters with ample opportunity to harvest a natural resource while also trying to reduce our over-abundant resident goose population before migratory populations arrive, or in areas where migratory geese are unlikely to be found. During the “Regular” Canada goose season, migratory birds are moving through the state and the number of birds hunters can harvest is greatly reduced. This is to protect migratory goose populations, which have been on the decline in recent years.

To hunt waterfowl, a person must have a Rhode Island State hunting license, a federal Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp, a Rhode Island State Duck Stamp, and be registered in Rhode Island’s Harvest Information Program. Hunters should check local laws regarding discharge of firearms.

The law requires that each waterfowl hunter sixteen (16) years of age and over must carry on

his or her person a valid Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (“Federal Duck Stamp”) signed in ink across the face. Waterfowl hunters must also possess a RI State Waterfowl Stamp, signed in ink across the face, or a State Waterfowl Stamp Certification obtained through the web-based online licensing system www.ri.gov/dem/huntfish.

Those wishing to obtain a RI waterfowl stamp may do so at the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Great Swamp Field Headquarters located at 277 Great Neck Road, West Kingston, RI, 02892. For further regulations see *RIGL 20-14*.

TIPS FOR PREVENTING PROBLEMS WITH CANADA GEESE

Never intentionally feed waterfowl.

It is illegal in Rhode Island and will create problems for humans and waterfowl alike.

Physical Barriers

- Fencing or shrubs along shoreline
- Scare tactics
- Supervised and trained dogs
- Reflective tape, flagging or balloons overhead
- Noisemakers

Population Control **

- Hunting where permitted
- Capture and removal
- Egg treatment

****The RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife does not assist with wildlife removal. Federal permits issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are required to capture, handle, or kill Canada geese. Permits to kill geese are not issued unless USDA has determined that other measures were not practical or effective. Contact the USDA for more information or assistance with goose removal.**

CONTACT USDA ABOUT LETHAL CONTROL

1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866- 487-3297)

Canada geese provide food and sport for hunters, and hunting permit sales generate funds for state wildlife conservation and management. In addition, revenue from hunting license fees and federal excise taxes on sporting arms and ammunition is distributed back to Rhode Island in the form of grants from the Wildlife and Sport Fisheries Program. These grants are used for land acquisition, facility maintenance, wildlife management, and all the programs established for management and hunting in the state.