

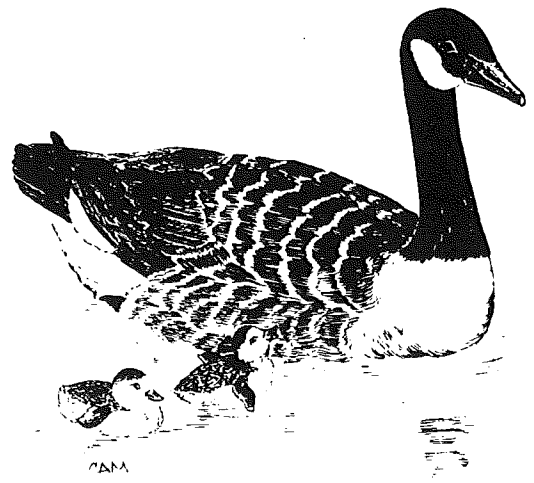
Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

The Canada Goose occurs in Vermont as two distinct and independent populations. The transient population, which breeds in Canada north of the St. Lawrence and winters on the East Coast from New Jersey to North Carolina, passes through Vermont in March and April (earlier if the weather is moderate) on its way north, and returns south each fall in October and November. Vermont's breeding population exhibits similar arrival and departure patterns, although local birds may tarry longer before departing and not fly as far south.

The breeding population originated from 44 birds released by the Vermont Fish and Game Department at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in 1956. There was no nesting by Canada Geese known in the state before that time. Under the protection and management of the Vermont Fish and Game Department the feral flock flourished, spreading slowly from Dead Creek into other marshes along Lake Champlain. Canada Geese, though long-distance migrants, have strong homing instincts, and fidelity to their natal grounds may have slowed their spread to other, more isolated potential breeding areas. Nonbreeding subadults, however, may wander far from the breeding grounds during the summer. While the origin of breeders along Lake Champlain almost certainly can be traced to the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, the origins of pairs nesting at Gale Meadows Pond and Bennington are less certain. Feral flocks that are now common in southern New England and New York are another possible source. Significantly, breeding has not yet been confirmed in the Missisquoi or Lake Memphremagog marshes at the northern end of the state.

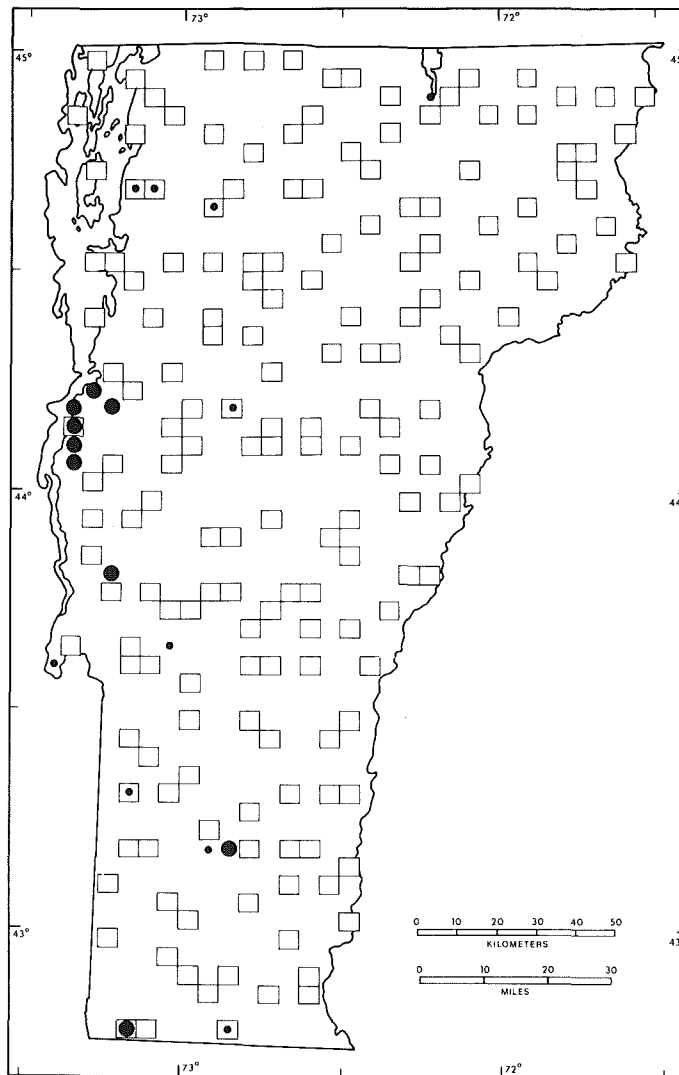
Large, long-lived birds, with a life span that may exceed two decades, Canada Geese are noted for fidelity to their mates. Although Canada's normally do not nest until they are 2 or (more often) 3 years old, they may pair on the summering grounds when



only 1 year old. Often this bond remains unbroken until the death of one member of the pair.

Canada Geese—particularly those that have lost their usual timidity—may select a variety of nesting situations. Golf courses or farm ponds, natural or elevated platforms, islands or muskrat houses all seem acceptable. Sites surrounded by water are preferred, but with a 4–5 kg (8–10 lb) gander on guard even urban pondside nests stand a good chance of success. Predators bold enough to ignore the gander's hiss of alarm may be dealt stout blows from his bill and wings. The nest, a scrape lined with nearby vegetation and down, is often exposed, but even with the female sitting on it, head and neck pressed to the ground, only the most cognizant observer is likely to spot it unless the gander is nearby. Average clutch size is about 5 eggs. Large clutches or broods that are occasionally reported (e.g., a brood of 16 in the Lake Champlain islands) could be the merger of two or more broods. Incubation, the female's task, takes 25 to 28 days, during which period she usually only leaves the nest for brief early morning and late afternoon breaks (Bellrose 1976).

Canada Geese are among Vermont's earliest nesting waterfowl. Goslings may be seen as early as mid May, and downy young have been reported in the Champlain Lowlands on dates ranging from May 19 to June 15. The young are very precocial and within a



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 8 (4%)

Possible breeding: 6 (75% of total)

Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 2 (25% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	4	13	50.0
Green Mountains	3	5	37.5
North Central	0	0	0
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	0	0	0
Taconic Mountains	1	6	12.5
Eastern Foothills	0	0	0

day are taken to water, where they can swim and dive readily and forage for themselves. They are, however, closely guarded by the parents. Although they grow rapidly, the young may not be able to fly until more than 2 months old. The adults are also flightless for a month of the rearing period since they lose all their flight feathers at once during the postbreeding molt.

Although both transient and local breeding populations are subject to hunting, particularly in the Champlain Lowlands, Canada Geese now frequently linger into early winter. Large flocks of several hundred to several thousand birds may be seen on Lake Champlain, where they rest when not forag-

ing in adjacent agricultural fields. Adult geese are principally herbivorous and granivorous, feeding on waste grain, winter wheat, and volunteer grasses and herbs.

The arrival of V-shaped skeins of geese heralds the changing of the seasons. Management of waterfowl areas like the state's Dead Creek wildlife refuge and the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge for the benefit of Canada Geese as well as other wildlife has brought recreation and enjoyment to sportsmen and nature enthusiasts alike.

DOUGLAS P. KIBBE