

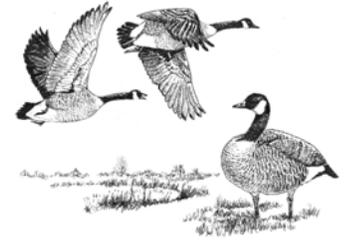
## Canada geese

### What are they?

Canada geese are large waterfowl (birds that spend most of their time in and near water). They are one of the most common forms of waterfowl found in the Chesapeake Bay region.

### What do they look like?

There are over ten different kinds of Canada geese. They range from the giant “honkers” –up to 24 pounds with a wingspan of six feet –to the smallest “cackling geese,” which weigh only two to four pounds. Typically, the “honkers” are the ones you would see in the Chesapeake region. They have long black necks and heads, with bands of white. The feathers on their backs and wings are grayish-brown. They have black bills and feet. Like other waterfowl, their feet are webbed, helping them paddle about in the water without much effort. The male and the female Canada geese look about the same. However, the females are usually smaller than the males.



### Where can you find them?

These geese are named Canada geese because their original breeding grounds are in Canada. However, many of the Canada geese in the Chesapeake live here all year. Migrating Canada geese have always spent part of their year in the Chesapeake region.

Like other waterfowl, Canada geese (those who live here all year long and those who are migrating) like to stay in areas of the Bay where the water and the land meet. You can find them on or near rivers, lakes, ponds, marshes, and the shallow waters of the Bay.

In recent years, more and more Canada geese stay in the Chesapeake region all year long. These resident geese have moved into urban areas such as golf courses and parks, where there is some open water and plenty of people who love to feed them.

### How do they behave?

Even when they travel over short distances, Canada geese often fly in a V-shape. Some people think this cuts the force of the wind for the younger birds that fly at the ends of the V.

Canada geese are very noisy, especially when they fly. They have different calls for different situations. Sometimes, it even appears that they have conversations, with each taking a turn at calling out.

They like to build their nests on the ground, in a shallow holes lined with grass, weeds, twigs, moss, and feathers. They often select a nest location hidden by tall grasses such as cattails and bulrushes near to water. Each year, the female lays 4 – 10 eggs. She tends the eggs carefully, turning them over so that they heat evenly. Males guard the nest, attacking anyone who comes near.

### What do they eat?

Canada geese graze on a wide variety of plants and grasses, including submerged aquatic vegetation such as eelgrass. They eat the leaves and seeds of grasses, cattails, sedges, bulrushes, pondweeds, phragmites, water lilies, and duckweed. They also eat in open fields and grasslands, dining on wheat and corn. They are particularly attracted to tender new plant growth.

Although they are chiefly herbivores (plant eaters), some Canada geese have also been known to eat small insects and tiny animals such as young oysters they find in the water. These carnivores (meat eaters) are generally young geese that need a high protein diet.

While they are feeding, one or two adult members of a flock (a group of birds) will watch out for danger.

### What eats them?

Raccoons, skunks, crows, gulls, snapping turtles, and opossums all prey on Canada geese eggs. Red fox and snapping turtles like to dine on young geese. The larger adult geese have few predators.

### Creature Feature

In June, all adult Canada geese lose their wing feathers. This process is called molting. Until their new wing feather grow back again (usually in six weeks), they cannot fly. During this time, they need to stay near water and a good source of food.