

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

CANADA GOOSE

Branta canadensis

Family: ANATIDAE
B075

Order: ANSERIFORMES

Class: AVES

Written by: S. Granholm

Reviewed by: D. Raveling, D. Airola

Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A widespread migrant and common to abundant winter (October or November to March or April) resident through out Central Valley, Salton Sea, and northeastern California. Preferred habitats include lacustrine, fresh emergent wetlands, and moist grasslands, croplands, pastures, and meadows. In California, breeds on northeastern plateau, but also in lakes of northern Sierra Nevada and Cascades. The few breeding colonies in central California coastal counties probably originated with introduced, or crippled individuals. On northeastern plateau, common February to November, and variably common to rare through winter, depending on availability of unfrozen water. At some seasons, much less numerous at lakes of northern Sierra Nevada and Cascades. In winter, locally common along Colorado River, but somewhat less common in lowlands and foothills of coastal counties, and local on mountain lakes and southern deserts. Uncommon, occurring irregularly, along shores of estuaries and in saline emergent wetlands (Cogswell 1977, McCaskie et al. 1979, Garrett and Dunn 1981). Central Valley apparently is main wintering ground of Aleutian Canada goose (*B. c. leucopareia*), a federally threatened subspecies (Palmer 1976). Coastal Del Norte and Humboldt cos. important staging areas during spring and fall migration; up to 1600 individuals seen at once, a record for this subspecies (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1978, 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: There is considerable geographic variation. In California, feeds mainly on green shoots and seeds of cultivated grains and wild grasses and forbs, by grazing and gleaning in moist fields. Also feeds on aquatic plants, sometimes by tipping. Regularly seeks grit.

Cover: Typically roosts on open water of lakes or ponds.

Reproduction: Nest-site highly variable, but usually on a firm, dry, slightly elevated site, near water and feeding areas, relatively isolated, with good visibility from nest. Nests especially on islands, but may nest in marshes on mats of bulrushes or on muskrat houses; on old raptor or heron nests in trees or snags; on gravel bars, dikes, rock ledges, or haystacks (Palmer 1976). Smaller islands apparently preferred, and may be in lakes or rivers. Most nests are placed to provide partial concealment for the incubating female without restricting her view. A nearby dry, loafing site for the male is essential. Readily uses man-made platforms, tubs, baskets, artificial rock islands (Yocom 1952, Hammond and Mann 1956, Craighead and Stockstad 1961, Brakhage 1966, Will and Crawford 1970, Rienecker 1971, Giroux 1981). Nests at Lake Almanor averaged 20 m (66 ft) high on broken trees or snags and 42 m (138 ft) high in old osprey nests (Airola 1987).

Water: No additional data found.

Pattern: Prefers to nest near water and suitable feeding areas. In winter, prefers to feed in fields near safe roosting areas on open water of lakes and ponds.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, mostly diurnal activity, mainly feeding early and late in day. Under hunting pressure, may feed nocturnally (Palmer 1976). Migration is both nocturnal and diurnal.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Resident year-round in northeastern California, except most of population departs in mid-winter if water freezes. Wintering populations elsewhere in California migrate north and east to breeding grounds in northeastern California, several western states, Canada, and Alaska, and absent May to September.

Home Range: While breeding, usually forages near nest (Palmer 1976), but foraged up to 1.6-8 km (1-5 mi) from nests in Utah and North Carolina (Williams and Sooter 1941, Hammond and Mann 1956). In winter, flocks foraged up to 48 km (30 mi) from roost in Texas (Glazener 1946). In northeastern California, young usually stay near nesting ponds if suitable forage and water remains (Airola 1980), but elsewhere they often move several miles to a rearing area (Palmer 1976). In California, Dow (1943) found nests spaced 2.7-137 m (9-450 ft) apart, and Naylor (1953) found 31 nests on one 0.2 ha (0.5 ac) island.

Territory: Breeding territory used for displays, nesting, loafing, and feeding, and must include a guard site for male.

Reproduction: Nests mainly March to June in northeastern California, and February to June on coastal slope (Cogswell 1977). Monogamous; not a colonial nester; nests are dispersed throughout suitable habitat, but high densities in optimal sites may appear like colonies. In California, 355 clutches averaged 5.1 eggs. For the large and medium-sized subspecies (including *B. c. moffitti*, the California breeding race), clutch usually 4-6, ranging from 2-9. Single-brooded. Incubation usually 27-28 days in *B. c. moffitti*. Precocial young are tended by both parents, first fly at 8-9 wk, and remain with parents until following spring. Sometimes reunite with parents after the nesting season. Some breed first at 2 yr, others when older (Palmer 1976).

Niche: Nests lost to predators may be fewer than those to weather and flooding. Important nest predators include coyotes, red foxes, striped skunks, ravens, crows, magpies, and gulls (Johnsgard 1975b). Avian predators less important once goslings have left nest. A large proportion of adults killed each year by hunters (Bellrose 1976). Often forages on grazed areas where new shoots abundant, but overgrazing detrimental to food supply and cover. Competes with osprey for nest sites (Airola 1987).

REFERENCES

- Airola, D. A., ed. 1980. California wildlife habitat relationships program: Northeast interior Zone. Vol III. Birds. U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Lassen Natl. For., Susanville. 590pp.
- Airola, D. A. 1987. Nest site competition between ospreys and Canada geese at Lake Almanor, California. *Raptor Research* 21:121-124.
- Bellrose, F. C. 1976. Ducks, geese, and swans of North America. 2nd ed. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA. 544pp.
- Brakhage, G. K. 1966. Tub nests for Canada geese. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 30:851-853.
- Cogswell, H. L. 1977. Water birds of California. Univ. California Press, Berkeley. 399pp.
- Craighead, J. J., and D. S. Stockstad. 1961. Evaluating the use of aerial nesting platforms by Canada geese. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 25:363-372.
- Dow, J. S. 1943. A study of nesting Canada geese in Honey Lake Valley, California. *Calif. Fish and Game* 29:3-18.
- Garrett, K., and J. Dunn. 1981. Birds of southern California. Los Angeles Audubon Soc. 408pp.
- Giroux, J. F. 1981. Use of artificial islands by nesting waterfowl in southeastern Alberta. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 45:669-679.

- Glazener, W. C. 1946. Food habits of wild geese on the Gulf Coast of Texas. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 10:322-329.
- Hammond, M. C., and G. E. Mann. 1956. Waterfowl nesting islands. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 20:345-352.
- Johnsgard, P. A. 1975b. *Waterfowl of North America*. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington. 575pp.
- McCaskie, G., P. De Benedictis, R. Erickson, and J. Morlan. 1979. *Birds of northern California, an annotated field list*. 2nd ed. Golden Gate Audubon Soc., Berkeley. 84pp.
- Naylor, A. E. 1953. Production of the Canada goose on Honey Lake Refuge, Lassen County, California. *Calif. Fish and Game* 39:83-94.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1976. *Handbook of North American birds*. Vol. 2. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 521pp.
- Palmer, R. S., ed. 1976. *Handbook of North American birds*. Vol. 3. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT. 560pp.
- Rienecker, W. C. 1971. Canada goose nest platforms. *Calif. Fish and Game* 57:113-123.
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1978. Concept plan for waterfowl wintering habitat preservation: Central Valley, California. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., Portland, OR. 196pp.
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1979. Concept plan for waterfowl wintering habitat preservation: California Coast. U.S. Dep. Inter., Fish and Wildl. Serv., Portland, OR. 234pp.
- Will, G. C., and G. I. Crawford. 1970. Elevated and floating nest structures for Canada geese. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 34:583-586.
- Williams, C. S., and C. A. Sooter. 1941. Canada goose habitats in Utah and Oregon. *Trans. North Am. Wildl. Conf.* 5:383-387.
- Yocom, C. F. 1952. Techniques used to increase nesting of Canada Geese. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 16:425-428.