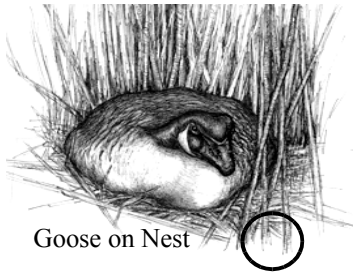


Old Naturalist – Observing Canada Geese

Many people view Canada geese as large flying pests that leave green poop in parks and grassy areas. In addition, if you get too near a family group in the summer, you may be attacked by a protective male. A goose can knock over a small child by batting it with its wing. Its true, geese make a mess, and they can be aggressive if someone gets too close to their offspring. However, in **April**, I always enjoy seeing nesting females on muskrat huts along our river. She will remain on the nest for almost a month, while the male is not far off, ready to protect her at the first sign of danger.



Goose on Nest

The first week of May is special time to see the first goslings of the season. They are so little and are a fuzzy yellow color. As soon as the young birds are born, the family abandons the nest, and they travel as a group with the goslings in-

between the adults. Family bonds are very strong between geese, and a mated pair will remain together for a lifetime. If one of the pair loses its mate, it will not bond with another goose for at least a year. I remember seeing an banded adult who had nested in the area for years and her mate did not return with her from migration. The bird made a forlorn honking sound and remained in the same area for a number of weeks.



Goose family

The goslings grow very fast, and by **July** it is difficult to tell a young bird from an adult. Also, during this time period, several family groups will join together, and it is not uncommon to see groups of 20-25 birds. By **August**, the adults are molting and growing new flight feathers for the fall migration. During this time, they tend hide out because they are unable to fly. In **September and October**, you can see family groups flying around in formation. Many casual observers think that the birds are migrating. However, geese don't actually migrate until the lakes freeze over. Canada geese are one of the last birds to leave, usually migrating in **December**. Their migration is short, often less than 300 miles, to the first open water.



My favorite time to watch geese is in **March**. I love seeing and hearing that first flock of migrating geese. Once they have arrive at their nesting area, geese start battling for a suitable territory for their nest. On the next page are some common types of goose behavior seen during this time period.

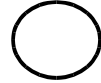
What to do: Beginning in March, watch for migrating geese; observe goose behaviors (next page); also look for a goose on a nest and a goose family with goslings.

Goose Behavior



Head-flip – The goose is in the water with neck extended and head moving from side to side.

What it means: This is a male behavior and is directed toward other males in a very aggressive interaction. It is also a courtship behavior in a greeting ceremony.



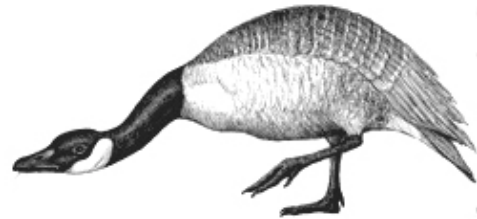
Head-upright – Neck is held straight up.

What it means: The goose is wary of a possible attack.



Head-pumping – The head is rapidly lowered and raised.

What it means: This is done in a conflict situation. A goose will often head-pump and then attack.



Head-forward attack – A goose has its neck forward and the head is low. A goose will run at another goose.

What it means: This behavior will be used to attack another goose.



Female



Male



The male may look slightly larger than the female. A male's neck is quite a bit thicker than the female.

Give yourself one point if you saw a goose nest. Give yourself one point if you saw a flock of migrating geese. Give yourself one point if you saw a goose family with goslings. Give yourself one point if you can tell a male from a female. Give yourself one point for every goose behavior you see.

Total possible points: 8

Total points for you: