



## DO YOU KNOW.....ABOUT CANADA GEESE

By Brittany Davis, Staff

First discovered in 1772, this enigmatic goose has either captured your heart or your ire. Sometimes mistakenly referred to as “Canadian”, these geese can be found all over Canada and the United States, in parts of Mexico, on the Kamchatka Peninsula in eastern Siberia, in eastern China and throughout Japan. Canadas have also been introduced in Europe with established populations in Belgium, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

Because of their wide range, ornithologists have separated the *Branta canadensis* into six subspecies that evolved different characteristics based on their environments but are still genetically Canadas. The subspecies most commonly found on the Eastern seaboard is the *Branta*

*Canadensis maxima*, or the Giant Canada goose. Taller and heavier than all the other subspecies, the Giant Canadas can top out at 4 kg (8.8 lbs) for females and 4.5 kg (10 lbs) for males with the other five subspecies ranging from 1.9 to 3.3 kg (4.2 to 7.3 lbs) for females and 1.9 to 3.9 kg (4.2 to 8.6 lbs) for males.

These geese are brown-bodied with white rumps, black tails, legs, neck and bill, and are well-known for their conspicuous white check patches. They have a rather loud, musical honk for communicating over long distances or during flight and a much more muffled honk when speaking in close quarters. Goslings have a higher pitched voice, often sounding as if they are saying here-here-here! Geese of all ages will hiss at potential intruders or predators and the large bodied adults will readily snap a heavy wing at an unwary passerby.

Confident in their place in our hearts and taking ambling strolls across busy intersections, the Canada is the delight of lakeside viewers and the bane of golf course denizens. As they must eat large amounts of grass, grains, underwater vegetation and berries but must still be able to take flight at a moment’s notice, these birds cannot be weighed down by all that heavy food. As their gizzards grind the food to a pulp, digestive enzymes work within minutes to strip every nutrient possible and expel the unneeded waste material all over the nicely manicured lawns humans are so proud of.

Though they pair-bond for life, Canadas will reside with their parents throughout their first year and will stay in adolescent flocks during their second and sometimes third year before finding a mate. Each spring, mated females will lay an average of eight eggs which they will incubate for 28 days after the final egg has been laid; the male stands guard. In less than 24 hours after the last egg has hatched, the parents lead their goslings to the body of water of their choice where their precocial young can swim, dive and feed. Eight to nine weeks after hatching, the young are ready to fly.



A TWO-DAY-OLD CANADA GOSLING, ONE OF 75 RECEIVED IN 2008.

In recent years, man has allowed this typically-migratory bird to reside year-round in its ponds that are kept from freezing over. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Canadas will readily take advantage of a free home with all the junk food that local restaurant patrons can supply. Many of these geese are suffering from nutritional deficiencies, brought on by years of swimming in fetid water and living off of food that can cause health problems in our own specie. Remember, all wildlife is best viewed from afar and only natural foods should be provided, if any is provided at all.