

Canada Geese



Canada geese were first brought to Britain from North America in the seventeenth century, as an addition to the waterfowl collection of King Charles II held at St. James' Park in London. Later they were taken to many parks and stately homes as an ornamental species and then, in the late 1940s, escapees began to colonize and thrive in the wild in most parts of Britain, although they are still not common in Scotland and Wales.

Today Canada geese have reached record numbers and flocks are often regarded as a nuisance in many English parks, rivers and lakes. The birds are often aggressive, harassing people for food and ousting smaller birds from their natural habitats. In defence of their territory, a pair will walk side by side towards an intruder honking loudly with their necks stretched out in front of them.

They also damage plants and reduce pleasant grassy areas to bare brown earth. In some areas, they have also become an agricultural pest when they move from the water to feed on crop plants.

It is easy to see why Canada geese were introduced into the royal collection. Both males and females are large, graceful birds with a striking black head and neck, and a prominent white throat patch that extends onto the face. This contrasts with the brown wings and the pale body. They are also extremely vocal, producing a range of deep calls, a loud *aa-honk* in flight and hissing sounds when threatened.

Canada geese live in flocks during the winter and breed in colonies. The nest is a shallow scrape in the ground, lined with feathers and soft vegetation. In early April typically 5 or 6 white eggs are laid and these are incubated by the female for almost a month while the male remains close-by to guard the nest. Both the male and female care for the young, which fledge after about 9 weeks, and stay with the parents until the following spring. Canada geese pair for life and normally return to nest in the same area where they were born.

These birds are long lived and may reach an age of 30 years in captivity but, with the pressures of the wild, an average life span would be around 15 to 20 years.