



Canada Geese Facts

Do you want to know more about one of the most common birds on parkland? Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q: Why are there so many Canada geese on the Fairfax County recreational fields, golf courses and park property?

A: Most of the Canada geese in Fairfax County are full-time residents. They find that Northern Virginia has a pleasant climate, plenty of grass to eat and places to nest and raise their young. Geese will usually flock to a location with water, like a lake or pond, because it is a safe place to hide from predators.

Q: Won't the geese ever return to Canada?

A: Geese have everything they need to live quite comfortably here in Northern Virginia, and so they have no reason to leave. When goslings hatch, they stay nearby the parents and therefore, do not learn how to migrate. Since geese can live up to 20 years, that makes for a lot of resident geese.

Q: I have seen park signs that discourage feeding the geese. Why shouldn't I feed the geese and ducks?

A: Feeding geese is very dangerous for them. Canada geese feast on a natural diet of wild grasses and other greenery. Bread and other "human" foods can make the entire flock sick. Feeding also encourages the flock to stick together which can spread disease and cause harm to the environment.

Q: Why are the geese so AGGRESSIVE and noisy?

A: Geese are not intentionally mean-spirited. They are wild animals and will act instinctively if they feel threatened. By honking and hissing, they communicate with the rest of the flock, warning the others if there are predators nearby.

Q: Why do geese fly in formation?

A: This might be one of the hardest questions to answer. No one is really sure, but there is likely a combination of reasons. Research suggests that it may be more efficient for geese to travel in formation since they can fly up to 70 percent further than solo geese. The physics of flight suggest that the "V" pattern produces the least amount of air resistance, which makes it more aerodynamic for the flock. It may also be safer if geese fly offset from each other because birds' eyes are on the sides of their heads; they cannot see directly in front of them, but can still keep watch on the entire flock.

If not you, who? Small things.

The easiest thing to do is to refrain from feeding the geese. We can help by sharing information with our neighbors and friends about why it's not a good idea to feed geese (or any other wild animal). Remember, feeding attracts the geese to areas commonly used by residents. We can enjoy viewing the geese, but feeding them is really not necessary and it's against Park Authority rules.

If not you, who? Big things.

Plant a goose "un-friendly" landscape. Discourage geese from clustering around ponds and lawns by planting and maintaining shrubs and tall grasses or reducing the frequency of mowing. A railing or fence might be installed to provide immediate relief. Information about the Herryty Goose Project and more goose facts can be found at: http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/facilities/goose_home.htm.

Canada geese . . .

- ◆ learn to nest, breed and migrate from their parents
- ◆ do not know how to migrate if they are resident geese
- ◆ choose a mate for life
- ◆ can increase their numbers by 15% every year
- ◆ are a federally protected species

Text by Samantha Cormode



Care, Educate, Inspire

Stewardship is about working together to care for the environmental and cultural resources of Fairfax County. People become stewards for different reasons. They may want to help ensure clean water and air. They may wish to share something with their children. They may be inspired by spiritual beliefs. Whatever prompts our commitment, it is easy to take an active role in stewardship. It can be a small and simple thing, or it can be much bigger. Either way, it all adds up to a Fairfax County that looks to its past with pride and to its future with confidence.

You can learn more about Fairfax County Stewardship, the Board of Supervisor's 20-year environmental vision and the Fairfax County Park Authority at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/stewardship



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