

Canada Goose

Species Description

Scientific name: *Branta canadensis*

AKA: Gwydd Canada (Welsh), Gàadh-dubh (Gaelic), Gé Cheadach (Irish)

Native to: North America

Habitat: Freshwater and coastal wetlands, feeding in nearby pastures and cereal fields

A common and easily recognised goose with a distinctive black head, long neck, and large white throat patch. Usually gathers in flocks.

Introduced as an ornamental bird in the 17th century, but restricted to only a few areas of the UK until the middle of the 20th century. Numbers increased markedly from this point, greatly facilitated by deliberate introduction of birds into new habitats during the 1950s and 1960s.

Can cause major damage to amenity grasslands, pastures and crops through grazing and trampling. Droppings can be a health and safety risk to humans, both through ingestion but also causing slippery conditions. Ecological impact includes damage to other wildlife (e.g. trampling other bird nests) and destruction of waterside habitat (e.g. reed beds). The birds also pose an airplane collision risk.

Canada goose is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such it is an offence to release or to allow the escape of this species into the wild. However the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 affords legal protection to all birds, their nests and eggs.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features



Identification throughout the year

Canada goose is resident in the UK and can be seen all year.

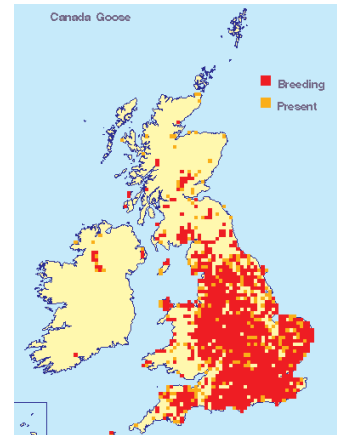
Field Signs

- Nests - on ground beside water, usually hidden, in woodland or on small islands
- Eggs - 5-7 in clutch, white to creamy white, 86mm x 58mm
- Call - bugling and whooping sounds similar to migratory swans
- Feeding signs - closely grazed areas near to water courses
- Footprint - leaves clear impression, up to 10cm long, smaller than mute swan
- Droppings - cylindrical, 5-8cm long, green when fresh turning brown-greyish black.



Distribution

Common and widespread in most of England. Less abundant in the north and south west of England, as well as Scotland, Wales and Ireland.



Source: Gibbons, Reid and Chapman 1993

Similar Species

In the UK, there are two types of native geese: the 'greys' (of the genus *Anser*) and 'blacks' (of the genus *Branta*). Canada geese are most likely to be confused with the other 'black' geese: barnacle and brent. Both brent geese and barnacle geese are winter visitors, unlike the Canada goose.

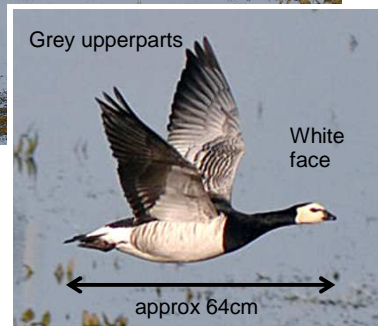
Canada Goose
For comparison



Barnacle Goose
Native
(*Branta leucopsis*)



Grey upperparts

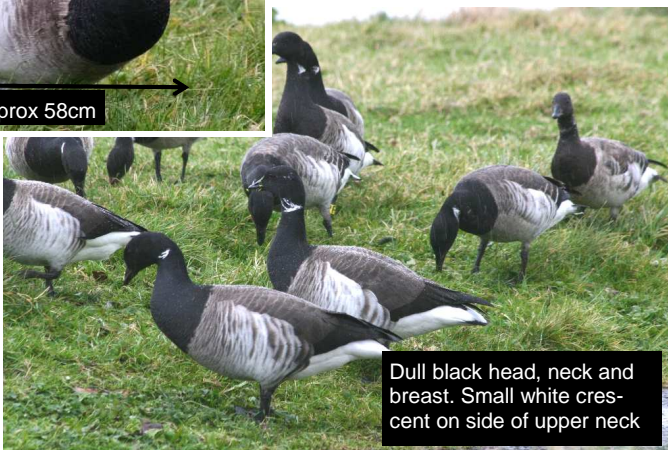


Brent Goose
Native
(*Branta bernicla*)



Strictly a maritime species in the UK, found mainly along the coast, but uses amenity grassland, adjacent pastures and cropped fields for grazing

Smallest and darkest of the "black" geese – near the size of a large duck



References and further reading:

- Gibbons, D, Reid, J and Chapman, R (1993) "The new atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991". T & AD Poyser
- Harrison, C and Castell, P (2002) "Collins Guide to the Bird Nests, Eggs and Nestlings of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East". Harper Collins
- Sample, G (1996) "Collins Field Guide to Bird Songs and Calls of Britain and Northern Europe". Harper Collins
- Svensson, L, Mullarney, K, Zetterström, D and Grant, P J (2008) "Collins Bird Guide". Harper Collins