



LIVING WITH... CANADA GEESE

Canada geese were imported by wealthy individuals as ornaments in the 17th century. They are now well-established in the wild, with an estimated UK winter population of 160,000.

Canada geese are monogamous and will normally pair for life depending on their breeding success. The female produces 5-6 eggs in a single brood between March and June. Nests are usually close to water, often on small islands. The geese will defend a small territory as well as the nest itself, but as they are a gregarious species they will tolerate other pairs nesting nearby and frequently nest in colonies. Canada geese normally remain close to the site where they hatched, and there may be a significant number of non-breeding adults in a flock.

Canada geese are highly intelligent birds that learn quickly and adjust to what they have learned. This could explain why they are turning up more often, and in bigger numbers, in urban and suburban areas. The abundance of food – human food scraps and public feeding in well-maintained parks – and relative safety of towns and cities offers distinct advantages. In the UK Canada goose populations are, for the most part, sedentary (they do not migrate) and as such the increased temperature in urban areas offers further advantages to rural living.

Canada geese are a popular species with many members of the public who visit town parks and other areas of water where geese are present. Many people enjoy watching and feeding them, but in any feeding of wildlife there should be some consideration for residents in the area who may not share the same opinion, as this could lead to negative attitudes towards the birds. Where you feed the birds, as well as what you feed them, is very important and encouraging large numbers of wild birds to an area can facilitate disease transmission and create environmental or health problems.



Despite the public's positive attitude toward Canada geese, some people do see them as a problem. They are frequently linked to damage of agricultural land and their tendency to flock in large numbers and create a great deal of mess can cause problems in towns and parks. Occasionally a Canada goose may defend its territory aggressively but confrontations with humans are rare. By feeding Canada geese responsibly, managing our waste properly or by deterring them altogether, these sorts of problems can be significantly reduced.

Are Canada geese and their nests protected?

All wild birds in England and Wales are protected under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. It is an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird; to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird that is in use or being built; and to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird. However under the Act it is possible to take action against some species, including Canada geese, under the appropriate licence.

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Can Canada geese numbers be legally controlled?

Wherever possible, the RSPCA would always prefer non-lethal solutions and lethal control should only be considered if there is a serious problem and non-lethal means are ineffective or impractical. Canada geese have basic legal protection under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. They can be legally controlled under licences issued by Natural England or Natural Resources Wales, but any action must follow the conditions specified on each licence.

Details of these licences are available from Natural England (www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences) and Natural Resources Wales (<https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/?lang=en>).

REASONS FOR CONTROL MAY INCLUDE:

- preserving public health and safety
- air safety purposes
- preventing the spread of disease
- preventing serious damage to livestock, crops, vegetables, fruit, or fisheries

Trapping must use approved methods and shooting must be carried out by authorised persons (i.e. persons acting with the authority of the land occupiers, land owners and the owners of the shooting rights on the land in question) as humanely as possible.

Another common method to legally control goose numbers is to limit breeding by preventing eggs from hatching. For example, by oiling, pricking or replacing eggs with dummy eggs.

Why do some people see Canada geese as a problem?

Problems associated with Canada geese include grazing and trampling (e.g. grassland in public parks and agricultural crops), fouling with droppings, damage to habitats (e.g. grazing reed beds or trampling other species' nests), as well as aggressive confrontations with other birds. Another, more serious potential problem is that of birdstrike – collision between birds and aircrafts. **However, many of these problems can be attributed to other species of waterfowl and in certain areas Canada geese may cause no problems at all.**



Can the RSPCA remove Canada geese from my garden/local park?

The RSPCA will only collect an animal in the event of a welfare issue, namely if the animal is sick, injured or orphaned and unable to survive in the wild on its own.

However there are circumstances where we might be able to help. If the bird has accidentally become trapped in your garden and there are other Canada geese nearby, one of our officers could remove it from your garden and release it back into the flock.

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How can I deter Canada geese from my garden?

Experience has shown that a single management technique is unlikely to be fully effective. Instead, different techniques are combined to achieve the best result.

- **Visual and/or acoustic devices:** Designed to scare the geese away from a site, these devices may be unattractive, require maintenance, and disturb the public. Research shows this only really works short-term, as geese will become habituated to them. These devices will therefore require frequent changes of location. They are most useful for protecting crops during specific periods, or to scare birds off islands.
- **Human-operated bird control:** A common method of deterring birds from a site is to have people to act as 'scarers', often equipped with a flag, shotgun or other scare device. The problems with this method include the high amount of human effort involved and the fact that Canada geese have shown very little fear towards people, particularly in areas where they may be fed by the public.
- **Habitat management:** This method relies on landscaping and barrier planting to make a water body and its surroundings unfavourable for the geese. However, such landscaping may adversely affect other waterfowl, damage the aquatic system and potentially pose a human safety risk. Barrier planting will restrict access and reduce the geese's feeling of safety but the risks to other wildfowl remain the same as with landscaping.
- **Fencing:** The most direct form of physical exclusion, even low fencing may be effective for deterring Canada geese while a gap between the fence and the ground would allow smaller waterfowl to access the area. However, fencing is often unfavourable for very large areas and requires a great deal of upkeep.

How can I feed Canada geese responsibly?

Don't feed them too much – you may encourage more birds into the area than it can naturally sustain and could lead to the birds being seen as a problem. Droppings can build up, making the area messy and slippery so make sure you vary where you feed them. Additionally, feeding them in the same spot can put them at risk from vehicles, dogs and people who may wish to harm them.

What should I feed Canada geese?

- Small amounts of grain such as **wheat**, **corn** or **bird seed**
- Fresh chopped greens like **cabbage** or **spinach**



AVOID FEEDING THEM BREAD!

It fills them up without giving them the nutrients they need. It's their equivalent of junk food and can cause malnutrition as well as affecting their growth, leading to a wing deformity called '**angel wing**', where, as the bird grows, the wrist joint fails to develop properly and twists. This then causes some of the wing feathers to stick out from the body. This is caused by poor nutrition, such as a high calorie diet (e.g. bread) that is high in proteins and/or low in vitamins. It is also thought that genetics may have a role to play as it is often only found in certain populations of waterfowl. **There is no cure; birds with this condition can live out their lives naturally but will be unable to fly.**

I have found a dead Canada goose with a ring, what should I do?

If you find a dead goose, or any bird that is ringed, we advise you to contact the phone number on the ring quoting all reference numbers on the ring. You can also visit [the British Trust for Ornithology website](https://www.bto.org.uk/) to report a ringed bird or for more information on bird ringing.

**To report an injured or sick
Canada goose to the RSPCA,
please ring the cruelty
and advice line on 0300 1234 999**