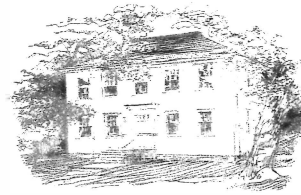


IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge-1861

Canada Geese Abound

As Canada Geese pass overhead in their annual migration from their Canadian breeding grounds to the southern U.S., their magnificence is obvious. Some Americans have suggested it be our national bird, rather than the Bald Eagle.

There are 11 subspecies of *Branta Canadensis*, each with distinctive characteristics. In distinctive V-shaped flight formation, flocks of Honkers undulate across the autumn sky, flying close to one another to take advantage of “drafting”, a principle often used by bicyclists or race car drivers. Each goose gets lift from the air currents coming off the wings of the bird ahead. Using this energy the flock in formation flies over 70% farther than each goose could fly alone. When the lead goose tires, it changes place, and another takes a turn at the apex of the formation, so the flock’s migration continues at 40 to 60 miles per hour.

Canada Geese, one of the most widely distributed North American water birds, range from 22-48 inches long,

weigh 3-24 pounds; and their wingspread can reach 6 feet. Males are usually larger than females, but they are similar in appearance. The position of their legs gives the birds excellent balance, and their feet function as paddles, affording adaptability to ground, air, and water.

How these majestic birds navigate year after year, from their nests to their winter home, traveling at altitudes of 1000- 3000 feet remains a mystery. Scientists theorize that 1) geese see various landscape cues as guides, 2) stars and constellations provide navigational aids, and 3) geese have an internal magnetic compass. Their biological clock signals when to migrate and how long to rest along the way. During hunting season, the flock is at risk from gamesman seek-

ing to harvest the birds. This year the Ohio goose season in this area is from Oct. 22- Nov.20, and Dec. 17- Jan. 29, 2012, with a daily limit for licensed hunters.

With many almost human characteristics, Canada Geese are monogamous and have been known to circle back to help their shot-down mates, often returning to their own death. Protective parents, both males and females care for their goslings for an entire year. Migrating flocks of extended families travel together, honking to encourage those at the front to maintain their speed. When the flock stops to rest and feed, a sentinel is posted to alert the group to potential danger.

There are indigenous flocks of *Branta* which inhabit Cincinnati year round, and Indian Hill ponds and lakes provide over-wintering areas for non-migrating geese. In some parts of the U.S., geese have become a nuisance, and wildlife managers have employed various techniques to control them.

Over the years, these waterfowl have been a valuable resource as a food source; their feathers were used in beds and pillows; and their grease was prized as a medicinal treatment. Our vocabulary has expressions derived from these birds, such as “wild goose chase”, “gooseflesh”, “goose step”, “goose egg”, and “cooking someone’s goose.”

The voices of Canada Geese announce their migration. The sound, described as *uh-whonk*, *uh-whonk* gave the bird the nickname “Honker” although 10 different sounds are used by *Branta* to respond to specific situation. Long ago, Cree Indians called the geese barking across the sky “the hounds of heaven”. As winter approaches, the spectacle of their passing overhead and in-flight “music” brings joy to all who appreciate the magic of flight, travel, and nature.

