

# TECHNICAL NOTES

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Portland, Oregon

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology Technical Note No. 26

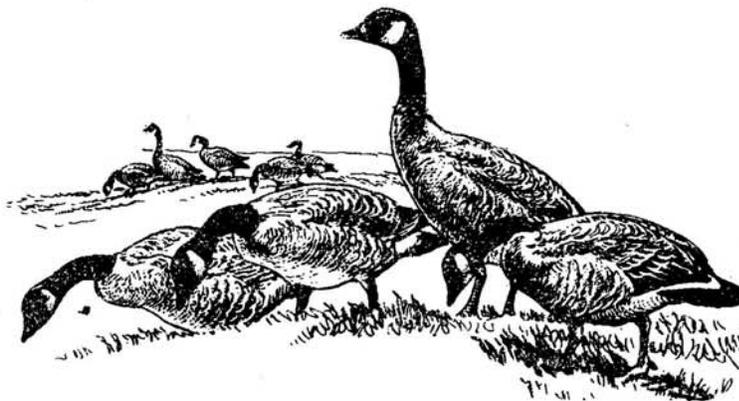
May 1980

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

FOR

CANADA

GEESE



In the State of Oregon

The common Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis canadensis*), is widely distributed throughout Oregon and particularly Eastern Oregon. They are locally known as "honkers". It is the only goose which nests in Oregon, however, most of the wintering population comes from northern breeding grounds. Canada geese are very large (9 lb. average), brownish grey birds with head and full length of neck, black, except for white cheek patches. This color pattern will distinguish the Canada goose from all other geese except for the three other varieties or sub-species of Canada geese which have similar markings and are also found in Oregon. These other Canada geese include the Western or Dusky Canada Goose which winters in the Willamette Valley and nests along coastal Canada and Alaska; the Lesser Canada goose which winters in Eastern Oregon and nests in Arctic Canada and Alaska; and the Cackling goose, a small version of the Canada goose which nests along coastal Canada and Alaska and winters in Western Oregon and California.

Four other species of geese which regularly visit Oregon include the Black Brant, a sea goose which winters along our coastal bays and nests along the Arctic coast, the Lesser Snow goose which visits Central and Eastern Oregon on wintering flights to California. It nests on the Arctic coast; the White-Fronted Goose which migrates through the central part of the state to wintering grounds in California and Mexico. It breeds in Arctic Canada and Alaska.

## FOOD

The food of the Canada Goose is largely vegetable matter and is mainly obtained by "grazing" in the stubble fields, pastures, grass seed fields, along streambanks and lake and reservoir shorelines. In fall and winter these geese pick up waste grain and nibble green herbage. In late winter and early spring flocks of geese can do considerable damage to young crops of wheat, barley, oats, cereal rye and grass seed crops. In marshes and along streams they feed on sedges, smartweed, and other kinds of aquatic plants, insects, larvae, crustaceans and small molluscs.

### Planning Suggestions

The common Canada Goose nests along shorelines of larger streams, lakes and reservoirs. Nests are constructed on islands and streamside cliffs. Nesting and rearing areas should be protected. In some instances, small islands can be constructed to attract nesting geese. Some refuges have provided nesting platforms for geese. These are built above ground level so as to provide protection from predators.

Attractive feeding areas can be provided by good pasture management such as mowing or grazing succulent green grasses and legumes to provide low growing green material; seeding barley in the fall at a heavy rate to provide new low growing green food; controlled burning of selected cheat grass patches to provide early green growth in the fall; fertilizing low growing green pastures, new grass seed fields and barley and wheat seedlings for fall and early spring use. Some operators claim crops are damaged by grazing geese while others say it makes the plants "stool" and produce more grain or seeds.

Cereal crops such as wheat, barley, corn and cereal rye can be grown and left unharvested to attract and feed geese. Cereal rye is a good short growing season crop to raise for geese in higher areas of Eastern Oregon. An unharvested strip or patch of a cereal crop can be left for geese in crop fields. This practice will also attract many other kinds of wildlife, particularly birds.

In some instances it may be necessary to provide refuge areas during the hunting season so that geese will have an attractive place to loaf and feed. These areas should be permanently established and kept inviolate from hunting or other trespass.

Geese prefer open situations on land in which to feed and rest and it may be necessary in some instances to clear brush and trees from field borders in order to attract geese.

Geese need grit in the form of coarse sand or pea gravel to help them digest their food. Although this gravel or grit is generally available along streams it may be necessary to provide this material, particularly

in refuge and loafing areas. Fine gravel on access roads into open fields which geese use is a good way to fulfill this need.

References: Outdoor Almanac; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Contact State SCS Biologist for unanswered questions.