

# OUTDOORS +

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A family of geese. There are more breeding pairs every year here in Montrose, which suggests the population is doing well. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

## Colorado's Canada geese

It's December and the honk of wild geese is in the air, a sure sign winter is closing in on us. Montrose is home to thousands of Canada geese, many of which winter and breed here.

When I was a kid, bringing home a goose for the family Christmas dinner was a goal of mine. Even though I put forth great effort, I was not successful. There just were not the number of geese around that are here now, and I was never able to deliver. I did bring home a fair amount of ducks, but it never seemed quite the same. That's my story, and I am sticking to it.

Canada geese are sometimes called Canadian geese or greater Canadian geese are the most popular species in Colorado. There are other species, such as brants and snow geese but not in the numbers of the Canada. Characterized by their long black necks and a white stripe under the chin, they are pretty easy to recognize.

The males, called ganders, can reach 15 pounds, while the females, called geese, may only hit 12 pounds. When a group of them is on the water, it is called a "gaggle of geese," and when in flight the group is known as a skein.



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Geese are generally herbivores, feeding on aquatic vegetation, grass, roots and young sprouts. They have love for corn as well, which is why you see them in the cornfields in the fall. You can find them in large green fields, such as golf courses. They can defecate so much that many townships consider them a nuisance and go through great lengths to scare them away. Ask any golfer what the course looks like after the geese have been in residence a few days.

Canada geese mate for life. After they reach 2, the search for a mate begins. If a mate dies, the goose will search for another mating partner. Geese can live 20 or more years in the wild.

Canada geese nest on islands, shorelines, marsh fields and along ditch banks. The nest is built with a lining of down feathers for insulation. A goose will lay a clutch of five to seven eggs and are incubated for around 30 days before the goslings are hatched. Most nesting takes place in Canada but some are nesting in the United States.

I have watched geese fly into the fields around my house for years. Each year, their numbers increase. The last couple years, I have even witnessed many are nesting here, which indicates populations are doing well.

Geese can attack a human, if they feel their nest is threatened. First, the geese stand erect, spread their wings and hiss loudly at you. They can then charge, attacking by biting and hitting you with their wings. It is a good thing they don't have sharp incisors or they could chew

you to the consistency of a plug of half chewed tobacco.

In the autumn, when the young goslings are strong enough for flight, the Canada geese begin their long migration south to their wintering grounds. Many of these geese are now wintering in Colorado. It is estimated that 20,000 geese have made Colorado their home.

By the beginning of the 20th century, over hunting and habitat loss had really taken a toll on Canada geese populations. By 1950, the Canada geese were believed to be extinct, until a small flock was discovered in 1962 wintering in Rochester, Minnesota.

The Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center started the Canada goose production and restoration program. The end of 1981, through this program, saw the release of 6,000 Canada geese at 83 sites in North Dakota. These geese have grown to population estimated at 5 million currently.

Geese are frequently found on golf courses, city parks and parking lots and have become the most common waterfowl specie in North America. They have come back with such vigor, that many areas regard them as a nuisance and pest. They are suspected of being responsible for high fecal coli forms at beaches.

Researchers have found that local birds, not the migratory flocks are the cause of most of these problems. Extending local hunting seasons, deploying noisemakers and hazing by highly trained dogs have all been used to control their behavior. It's a far cry from being near extinction

just 70 years ago.

In the United States, Canada geese are the second most damaging bird to strike airplanes, with first place belonging to turkey vultures. In 1995, a U.S. Air Force E-3 Sentry, from Elmendorf Air Force Base, Alaska, struck a flock of geese during takeoff that resulted in two engine failures. The plane crashed, killing all 24 crewmembers.

U.S. Airways Flight 1549 had a collision with a flock of migrating geese in 2009. The aircraft suffered a total loss of power after takeoff, causing the crew to do an emergency landing on the Hudson River. Fortunately, there was no loss of human life.

Goose hunting is very popular in Colorado, with many water fowlers taking to the fields each year. The dollars raised from these hunting licenses help ensure lands for nesting and future healthy populations will stay with us, through efforts of Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

As for me, I never have managed to get a goose around Christmas. It is not really that big of a deal and I no longer dwell on it. Besides, Christmas duck is not all that bad.

*Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)*



**Debbie Reed**

Broker Associate  
(970) 209-1396  
[DebbieReedRealtor.com](http://DebbieReedRealtor.com)



*In this wondrous season ...*

"... promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet. To make all your friends feel that there is something in them ... to think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best. .. to wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile. To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. To be too large for worry and too noble for anger ..."

- Christian D. Larson

Let the mother with small, tired children go ahead of you at the grocery store. Smile at everyone ... it may be the only smile they receive that day. You will have given a gift that did not deplete your bank account, but rather, you have added to the account in your heart.

**Phelps Real Estate Group, LLC**  
501 S Townsend Ave • 970.209.1396  
Montrose, CO 81401

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