

Wascana Goose Summers on the Arctic Prairie

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Although it is known that the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) is a relatively common breeder in Saskatchewan (Caldwell, 1963) and that they do not normally breed before their third year, the location of non-breeding birds during the mid-summer has remained a mystery. These one and two-year-old birds have never been found within their known breeding range at this season in the numbers in which they are known to exist.

The resident flock of Canada Geese on the Wascana Marsh at Regina has been under closer observation than any other of comparable size in Saskatchewan. Fred G. Bard, Director of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History (pers. comm., 1963), has noted the annual phenomenon of the disappearance in the spring of a large portion of the wintering birds, with reappearance by early fall. Similar occurrences have been witnessed on other major goose nesting marshes. Flocks of obviously unpaired geese arrive in April shortly after the local breeders and leave again by late May or early June. Since subsequent sightings would certainly be made if they remained on our prairie or parkland marshes, we have assumed they must travel to isolated areas further north to summer. Ted Jonasson, a Conservation Officer in the Department of Natural Resources of Uranium City (pers. comm., 1963), on June 6, 1963, noted such a major northward flight of large Canada Geese over the east end of Lake Athabasca. Subsequently, on June 19, A. H. McPherson, Canadian Wildlife Service biologist (pers. comm., 1963), noted a major influx of large-type Canada Geese into the Aberdeen Lake region of the Northwest Territories. Previously, large mid-summer moulting concentrations of what were believed to be the larger races of Canada Geese had been noted and recorded by Canadian Wildlife Service personnel and others (Clarke, 1937) on the Thelon River, Northwest Territories. There was speculation that the Saskatch-

ewan birds might be associated with them.

Dr. I. McTaggart Cowan, Head of the Department of Zoology, University of British Columbia (1954), reported on two juvenile Canada Geese (*B.c.moffitti*) banded in southern British Columbia and subsequently recovered in the Bathurst Inlet area, providing positive proof that these birds at least occasionally did travel to Arctic regions. E. Kuyt, Canadian Wildlife Service biologist (1962), provided the first firm evidence that the geese moulting on the Thelon were from the large-type races breeding further south. On June 19, 1960, he captured a moulting goose at approximately 101° 48'W, 64° 21'N, which had been banded as a pre-flight young in 1957, at the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge, near Malta, Montana.

In July of this year (1963) I conducted some preliminary investigations concerning the geese on the Thelon River. Through arrangements made by A. Dzubin, Canadian Wildlife Service biologist with Ducks Unlimited, I had the privilege of joining R. A. Ruttan's Canadian Wildlife Service Barren Ground Caribou tagging crew, located on the Thelon River between Beverley and Aberdeen Lakes. It was planned that I should have the opportunity of taking a census of the geese on 150 miles of the river and connected lakes and of collecting some for identification purposes.

On July 12, 1963, the caribou tagging teams combined on a drive in which 500 Canada Geese out of a total of approximately 2000 were caught and banded, at 100° 07'W, 64° 33'N. Twenty-nine previously banded geese were caught in the drive. Ten of these had been banded near Rochester, Minnesota, where *B.c.maxima*, once thought to be extinct, was recently rediscovered (Kimball, 1963). The remainder had been banded at Oak Point, Lake Manitoba, and on known wintering areas of birds breeding in Manitoba.

Of special interest to Saskatchewan

was a banded goose collected July 3 from a flock of about thirty moulters. This female had been trapped in June, 1962, as a pre-flight young from the Regina flock, and banded and released on the South Saskatchewan River west of Saskatchewan Landing, by J. Nelson, then with the Saskatchewan Wildlife Branch. From Ducks Unlimited (Canada) banding records on file in Saskatoon, we know the geese raised on that section of the river winter at least as far south as western Nebraska. On its first north-bound migration then, this yearling goose chose to travel an additional 1000 miles beyond its birthplace to summer in sub-arctic habitat.

A noted authority on geese, J. Delacour (1954) mentions the tendency for non-breeding Canada Geese to wander in the summer. E. Kuyt (1962) believed this might be why these geese were found on the Thelon, suggesting that their presence might be a recent phenomenon possibly compelled by increasing drought on the breeding marshes or an increasing population. In the light of what we know of conditions on the southern breeding grounds and the new data gathered this summer, I rather suspect this northward movement is traditional, being neither recent nor random. Further investigation may show, I believe, that these geese are as consistent in their use of extended northern travel routes and even moulting sites, as they have already been shown to be in their use of breeding and wintering localities.

Three successive aerial inspections, with a few days elapsing between each flight, were made of a few of the moulting groups of Canada Geese on the Thelon. No change in the location of the groups was noted and nearby groups appeared to remain segregated. This and the preliminary banding data support the belief that each group of moulting geese may be a distinct segment of a fly-way or sub-flyway population. Should this prove true, the ease of making a census and banding of birds in this area suggests some intriguing possibilities for obtaining unique data for Canada Goose management. Information concerning where these birds were shot and when they re-identify themselves with their respective breeding flocks would then become of supreme importance. It is hoped these last major gaps in the knowledge of the range and movements of these geese may soon be filled. This will further enable management agencies to develop the full potential of these magnificent birds.

LITERATURE CITED

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Bill Reese, Dept. of Indian Affairs, Fred Riddle, Dept. of Northern Affairs, and 600 moulting Canada Geese trapped on the Thelon River, Northwest Territories, July 12, 1963.



Kuinangnak, a local Eskimo, holding one of the several large-type Canada Geese trapped on the Thelon River, July 12, 1963, which had distinctly white foreheads.