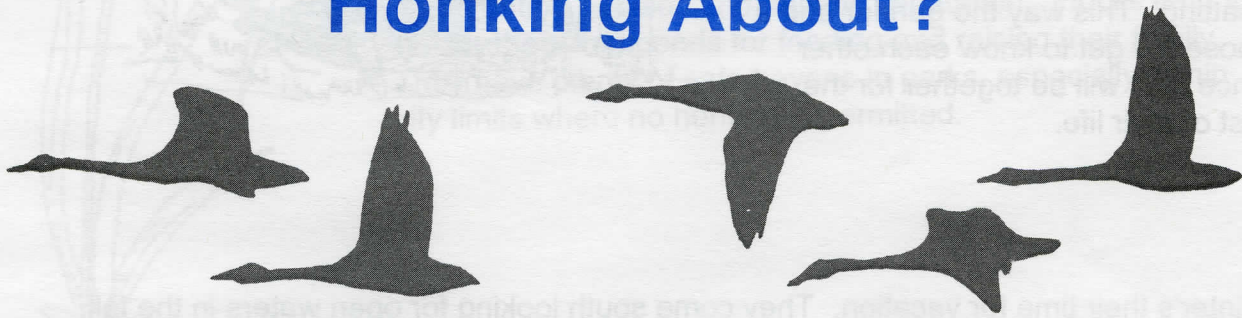


# NATURE DETECTIVES

Winter 2000 - 01

## What are the Geese Honking About?



### Lessons from Geese

**FACT 1:** As each goose flaps its wings it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

**LESSON:** People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling with the help of one another.

**FACT 2:** When the lead goose tires, it flies to the back of the formation and another goose flies to the point position.

**LESSON:** It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each other's skills, capabilities and unique arrangements of gifts, talents or resources.

**FACT 3:** When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock

**LESSON:** If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we are strong.



## Geese on vacation

It's winter and the geese rest near an unfrozen lake. You can hear them from far away. They seem to be eager to tell stories all the time. You can see them preening their feathers vigorously with their bills. The gander (male geese) and the goose (female geese) will do their courtship with ritual dancing and chatting. This way the gander and a goose will get to know each other since they will be together for the rest of their life.

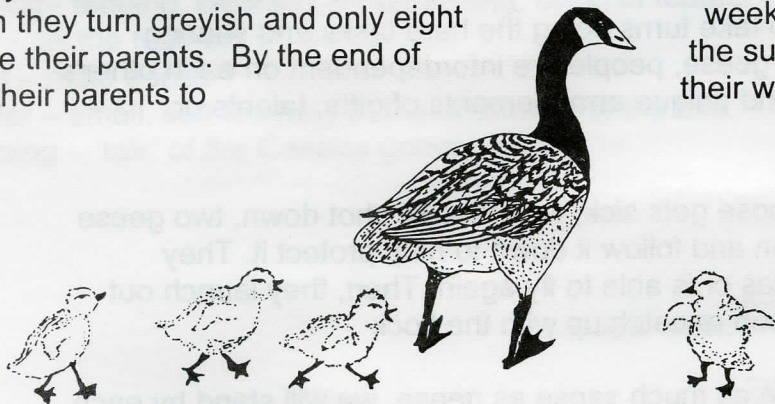


Winter's their time for vacation. They come south looking for open waters in the fall, when their home starts to be unpleasantly cold. They are kept warm by their down feathers which insulate their bodies. Geese can live in cold temperatures but they need their ponds to be ice-free.

Now it is spring so they get ready to fly back north to the place they grew up. They will migrate in large groups called flocks until they reach their familiar marshland. The goose and the gander will mate on the water. Then they look for a good place for a nest. Geese prefer little islands in a marshland. This keeps the predators like fox and coyote away. The goose will settle down to lay two to nine eggs while the gander stays close to protect them. As soon as the goslings (baby geese) get out of their protective shell they are led to the water by their mother.

first then they turn greyish and only eight looks like their parents. By the end of fly with their parents to

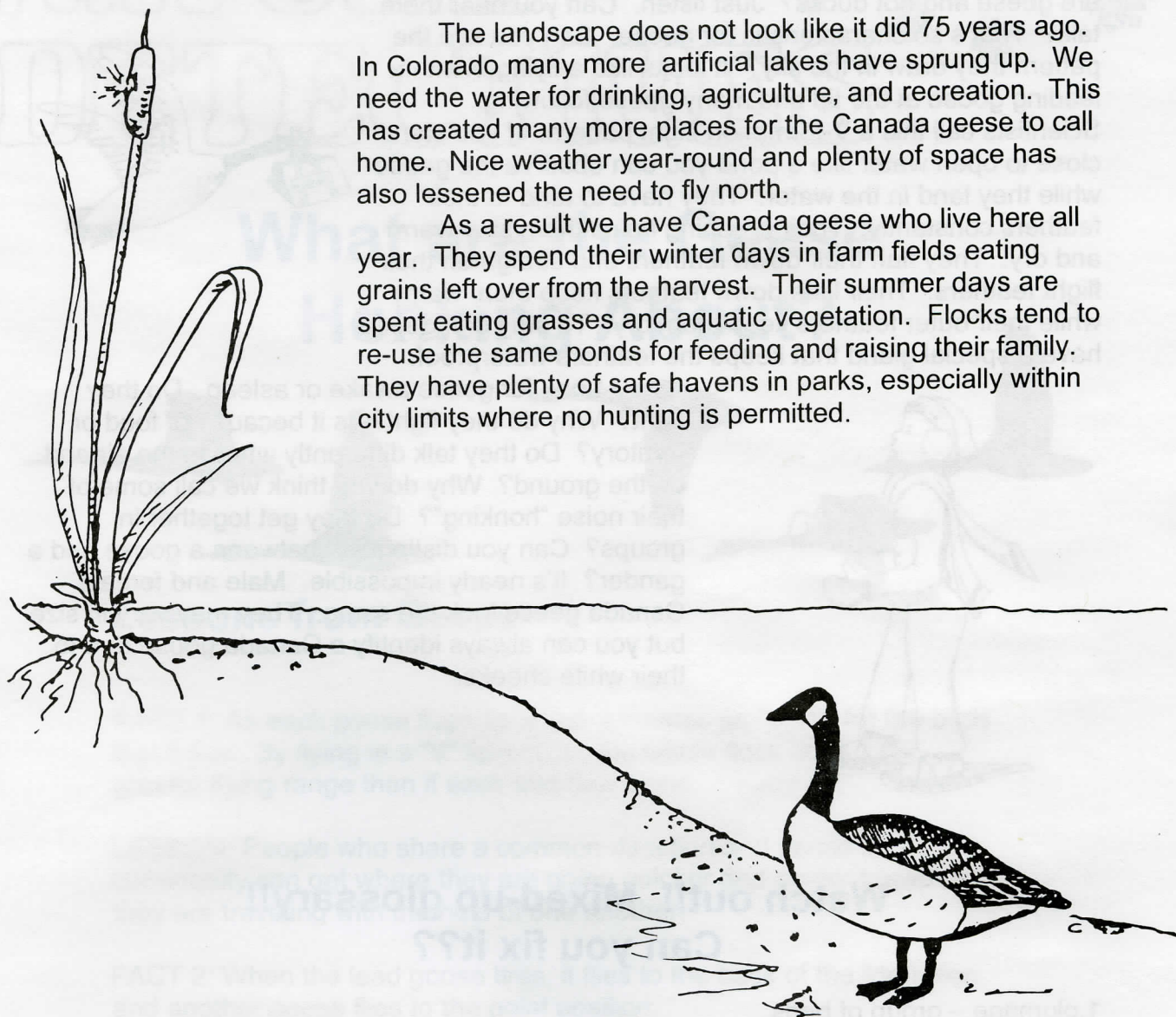
Their feathers are yellowish weeks later their plumage the summer they take off and their winter home.



## Not All Geese Migrate

The landscape does not look like it did 75 years ago. In Colorado many more artificial lakes have sprung up. We need the water for drinking, agriculture, and recreation. This has created many more places for the Canada geese to call home. Nice weather year-round and plenty of space has also lessened the need to fly north.

As a result we have Canada geese who live here all year. They spend their winter days in farm fields eating grains left over from the harvest. Their summer days are spent eating grasses and aquatic vegetation. Flocks tend to re-use the same ponds for feeding and raising their family. They have plenty of safe havens in parks, especially within city limits where no hunting is permitted.



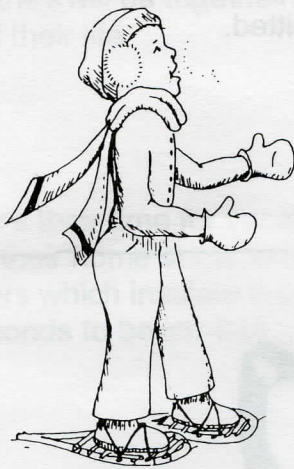
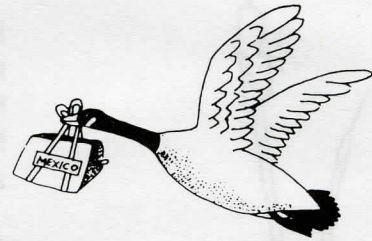
## To Hunt, or Not to Hunt?

Canada Geese have been hunted for a long time. Native Americans and early pioneers hunted them for food. Today however, most people hunt them for sport. During the fall is usually when geese are allowed to be hunted. Currently, geese are so numerous that hunting is necessary. Otherwise the geese would not have enough food and space, and in some places they might starve. So hunting can keep the population strong and healthy.



## Winter Walk

A flock of geese is flying above. How do I know these are geese and not ducks? Just listen. Can you hear them talk? That's so characteristic for geese. Can you see the pattern they draw in the sky? It looks like a flying V with a leading goose at the tip and many geese following. Scientists call this a V-formation flight pattern. If you stand close to open water like a pond you can observe the geese while they land in the water. They have to tend to their feathers constantly. Their preening helps them stay warm and dry. They fluff their down feathers and straighten their flight feathers. Their little down feathers keep them warm while their outer feathers keep them dry. To stay dry, geese have a special gland that keeps the feathers waterproof.



Look for geese awake or asleep. Do they fight? Why do they fight? Is it because of food or territory? Do they talk differently while in the air and on the ground? Why do you think we call some of their noise "honking"? Do they get together in groups? Can you distinguish between a goose and a gander? It's nearly impossible. Male and female Canada geese look the same. They may vary in size but you can always identify a Canada goose due to their white cheeks.

## Watch out!! Mixed-up glossary!! Can you fix it??

1. plumage – group of birds
2. honking – tending, cleaning, straightening, oiling of feathers
3. flock - all the feathers on a bird
4. down – male goose
5. gander – small, soft feathers at the underside of the bird
6. preening – 'talk' of the Canada goose

### correct answers

flock – group of birds  
preening – tending, cleaning, straightening, oiling their feathers  
plumage – all the feathers on a bird  
gander – male goose  
down – small, soft feathers at the underside of the bird  
honking – 'talk' of the Canada goose