

June 2004

Edition



Featured: Canada Goose

NEBRASKA WILDLIFE REHAB, INC.

The Critter Chronicle

NWRI Needs Help!

Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc. is desperately in need of volunteers. Each year we see a rise in the number of wild animals admitted to our organization for care, and each year we struggle to find enough volunteers to rehabilitate the animals, and raise the funds to support our organization. If you have some time and energy to spare, or if you know anyone who does, please consider donating your time to NWRI! Our volunteer needs are described below.

Songbird Hotline Specialist – One to two people are urgently needed to answer calls from the public regarding songbirds in need. You would not need to be available at all times to take calls; however, we do ask that you return calls on a daily basis. The volume for this portion of our hotline is heavy (2-15 calls per day) from approximately April through August, and quiet (1-2 calls per week or less) the rest of the year. This is a great position for a bird enthusiast, but we can also train any willing volunteers to educate the public on eggs and nests, baby birds, fledgelings, and adult birds. If a Songbird Team Leader comes forward, the Hotline Specialist would help organize the intake of birds from the public into rehabilitation with the Team Leader.

Hotline Specialist (other teams) – If you are willing to work with the public, but are unable to care for animals at this time, you may be able to assist with handling calls from the public on a variety of animal species. For any hotline position, we ask that you are flexible, willing to learn appropriate procedures for dealing with wildlife, and ready to educate the public in an upbeat and positive manner.

Songbird Team Leader – We are urgently in need of one to two people to coordinate the Songbird Team. At this time, we are able to care for less than 100 birds each year, when normal capacity for this team should be over 1,000 birds each year. We ask that the Songbird Team Leader(s) be willing to work with the public and the Nebraska Humane Society, coordinate volunteers and supplies, and either know basic bird rehabilitation care, or be willing to learn. The Team Leader is responsible for all federal and state reporting for the team. This position can be time-consuming, but if you are organized, can recruit and coordinate a large team of volunteers, and love birds, this team is for you! Team Leaders

are members of the Animal Operations Committee (AOC), and are expected to attend meetings six to eight times per year.

Songbird Volunteers – Volunteers who would like to rehabilitate baby birds must be available for most of the day, from sunrise to sunset, during the spring and summer months, if they have birds in care. Most baby birds are in care for only 2 to 3 weeks; however, they must be fed 2-4 times per hour during the day. This is an ideal volunteer position for stay-at-home parents or retirees that would like to help rehabilitate Nebraska's native wildlife!

Animal Care Volunteers (All Teams) – Volunteers are needed to learn the basics of wildlife rehabilitation, and to feed and wild animals. Opportunities are available to fit most interests and schedules. No raccoons will be placed in homes with children under the age of 14. All animals must be wilded according to NWRI standards, and released appropriately. Short-term and longer-term commitments are available on all teams, depending on your time and space availability.

Rabbit Co-Team Leader – One person is needed to share team leader responsibilities, such as agency reporting, hotline calls, animal care and coordination.

We will be seeking a Raccoon Team Leader in the future as well, and working on this team is a great starting off point!

All animal caretakers will be provided with the education, and most of the equipment and supplies necessary to rehabilitate animals. They may be asked to personally supply some materials for rehabilitation. They will operate under our organizational state and federal permits. We do ask that our caretakers continually seek new education and information on wildlife rehabilitation and our native wildlife species to insure that NWRI grows as a professional organization. National wildlife rehabilitation training is offered for a fee each fall, and personal training is offered on a continuous basis by our experienced rehabilitators. We encourage our volunteers to educate themselves to insure their personal growth and success as rehabilitators and stewards of our native wildlife.

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Thanks to Our Many Friends and Donors

NWRI is deeply grateful to the following individuals, foundations, and businesses for their contributions to our work in providing medical management and compassionate care for the injured, sick, and orphaned wildlife that come to our volunteers.

Bluebirds Across Nebraska

Marlys A. Christensen

Bob and Joy Hilliard

Beverly Mead

Talia Y. Tene

Kuba Travnicek

Maria at SuperTarget, 178th and Center

Starlings and Grackles... A Rehabilitation Dilemma

Over the years, some of our members have shared their concern with the decision of NWRI to rehabilitate birds that are often considered a nuisance in our area, such as grackles and starlings. It is often stated that these species, along with others, out compete other songbirds in our area, most notably the more desirable species we enjoy seeing so much at our feeders. We certainly understand the concern of our members, and have discussed this issue openly on many occasions. We would like to address this issue here, and ask for the input of our membership.

Because we do not currently have a working songbird team, there are limits to the numbers and types of birds we can take at this time. Many of our mammal rehabilitators will care for birds on a limited basis; however, their acquisitions are often limited to fledgling and adult birds. Due to the sheer numbers of starlings and grackles, we often end up rehabilitating more of these birds, as more of them are presented to us for rehabilitation. This could indeed be an example of a serious imbalance in our ecosystem, particularly when one researches the increase in numbers of imported species, such as the European starling and the house sparrow, while there is a decrease in the numbers of many native songbird species. It is important to note that other "nuisance" species, such as grackles and cowbirds, are native species that have simply adapted more readily to the growth of human settlement.

At this time, it is NWRI's policy to accept any wild animal for rehabilitation, as long as the animal has established wild populations in the state of Nebraska, and is not restricted under the scope of our state and federal permits. When a permanent songbird team leader and team of volunteers are in place again, we will ask them to discuss the pros and cons of our policy, and review this issue thoroughly. We appreciate your patience as we endeavor to shape a rehabilitation policy that is in the best interest of the animals and our ecosystem.

We welcome your comments on this matter. If you would like to share your thoughts, please e-mail them to lastastny@yahoo.com, or mail them to our P.O. Box address. We appreciate your interest in, and concern for, Nebraska's wildlife and our organization!

Our apologies... To Wake Robin Elementary

Our sincere apologies go out to Patti Smith, and the children and staff of WAKE ROBIN Elementary School in Bellevue. The name of their school was erroneously listed as Wake Forest Elementary in our previous newsletter. The children of Wake Robin collected pennies for wildlife, and donated the proceeds of the collection to NWRI. Thank you Wake Robin!

Featured: Canada Goose—*Branta canadensis*

Canada Geese are waterfowl that live throughout most of North America. They are well known for migrating in large V-shaped flocks and rich, and for their instantly-recognizable musical honking.

There are 11 geographical races of Canada goose, ranging in size from the Giant Canada Goose of the northern prairies to the Cackling Goose, which is only slightly larger than the Mallard, which nests in the Yukon and winters mainly in California. The most abundant race is the one that nests south of Hudson Bay, which numbers well over a million, while the rarest is the Aleutian Islands form, which nests on only two small islands and numbers barely over a thousand.

These large birds can range in size from 22-26" to 35-45". Their wingspan can range from 50-68". The weight of *Branta canadensis* varies depending on the subspecies. The larger subspecies can weigh up to 9 pounds, whereas the smaller subspecies may weigh only 3 pounds. They have a brownish body with a black head, long black neck, black bill, and crown. They have a contrasting white cheek and throat area. Their back, upper wings and flank are dark brown with a lighter brown or almost-white breast and belly. They have a short black tail and black legs with black webbed feet.

Canada Geese cover a wide range across North America. Canada Geese in different areas may be different sizes, have different vocalizations or have somewhat different coloring than those in other areas. All groups have the characteristic long black neck, head, crown and bill and the white cheeks. The smallest Canada Geese (called "cackling geese" because of their high-pitched vocalizations) are only 1/4 the size of the largest Canada Geese (called "honkers").

Like other geese, these birds are chiefly grazers, feeding on stubble

fields and eating marsh vegetation. They commonly eat aquatic vegetation, grass, roots and young sprouts, as well as grain and corn from agricultural areas. They prefer the habitat offered by lakes, bays, rivers, and marshes. These geese are increasingly tolerant of humans, with some nesting in city parks and suburbs. They are especially noticeable in late summer and early fall, when they form molting flocks on golf courses and large lawns.

Canada Geese build their nest with grass and plant material and line it with feather down. The geese typically nest on the ground on islands and shoreline; however, they are able to adapt to urban settings, and will even nest on the edge of the runway at the airport or on the edge of the water traps on the golf course!

The female lays her eggs as soon as there is open water for mating and snow-free nest sites. The female typically lays a clutch of 5 to 7 white eggs, while the male guards the nesting area. Each egg takes a little over a day to lay, and the eggs typically take about a month to incubate. The female



turns the eggs regularly to maintain the heat necessary to allow for hatching. The male protects the territory and stays nearby to call a warning if danger approaches. A male goose guarding the nest will often chase predators hissing with his wings spread.

Males often send out an alarm by flying into the air and honking as a predator approaches. This alerts not only his mate, but others nesting nearby. Females lower their bodies onto the nest and stretch out their necks to camouflage the nest.

When ready to hatch, the baby geese peck at their shells with the egg tooth, found at the end of their bill. It takes 1 to 2 days for them to free themselves from the egg. Newly hatched Canada Geese look much like ducklings with yellow and gray feathers and a dark bill. But within a week they grow to be rather awkward-looking, fuzzy gray birds. By nine to ten weeks old, they've grown their flight feathers and look like slightly smaller versions of the adult. The newly hatched goslings are able to swim immediately. The male and female goose both accompany the babies during their swims. Goslings can dive and swim for 30-40 feet underwater, and they eat almost continuously to attain growth for the first migration flight.

After the goslings have hatched, the family moves away from the nesting site on foot toward more favorable feeding areas. Five weeks after the

goslings hatch, the females of some subspecies begin moulting (the males begin right after mating). During this time, the adults of these sub-species are unable to fly. The adults regrow their flight feathers and are ready to fly at about the same time as the goslings are able to learn - at nine weeks

old. In autumn, as soon as the young are strong enough for the trip, they begin their migration south. They learn the migration routes from their parents and follow the same route in subsequent years.

Featured: Canada Goose (Continued from Page 3)

Although an increasing number of Canada Geese are choosing to overwinter in urban areas where open water is common, the majority fly south to the United States and even Mexico during the winter.

Males in this species are more aggressive than females. The bills are used not only for eating, but also in attacks and grooming. These birds take to flight when danger approaches. They also lay out flat and still on the ground with their necks stretched out to be less visible to the danger.

Canada Geese have good eyesight, which is necessary for flight. They must move their heads in order to see out of their eyesight range. Canada Geese have excellent hearing and the ears are located on the side of its head.

During warm days of the year, geese flatten their feathers against their body to reduce the dead air space and keep them cool. On cold days, they fluff their feathers to increase their insulating ability. These birds love to swim and bathe in the water, especially on warm days. The Geese swim and flap around and sometimes completely submerge themselves.

They are seldom found alone and communicate constantly with many sounds. Canada

Geese often use body movements to communicate with each other. These geese also have the ability to make at least 10 different calls. They fly in flocks in the form of a "V" or a diagonally straight line to minimize the effort for the birds following the leader. Each bird doesn't fly directly behind the others, but off to an angle. They migrate at a slow pace, stopping along the way. Because of this pace, they arrive at the breeding grounds in good physical shape. Most geese mate for life. Older geese tend to return to the same



breeding territory each year. The female chooses the location for nesting and even builds the nest without the male. The males defend the territory, nest, and eggs from intruders, such as other geese. The female has to leave the nest to eat, rest, swim and preen.

The main enemy of the Canada goose is people. In an attempt to control rising populations, some areas have begun egg collection and/or hunting efforts to decrease the number of geese in their area.

Natural enemies include the Arctic fox, gulls, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Snowy Owls, and Prairie Falcons. Unguarded nests and eggs are targets for predators such as gulls, common ravens, American crows, skunks, domestic dogs, and many others.

Canada Geese have been hunted by humans for hundreds of years. Native Americans hunted them in the spring migration. Eskimos hunted them by taking advantage of the molt that leaves them flightless. Even early white settlers took advantage of these birds and hunted them for food. These birds are still being hunted today in the United States and Canada.

As well as dispersing the seeds of the plants they eat, Canada Geese are important prey for many predators in the ecosystems in which they live.

Geese can become a nuisance, especially when normally migra-

tory birds become resident. They

can overgraze lawns and crops, leading to erosion. On lawns, their feces can annoy humans. Build-up of fecal matter can lead to reduced water quality, by fostering bacteria and adding much nitrogen and phosphorus.

In 1918 when the Migratory Bird Treaty was passed, spring shooting was prohibited in the United States and Canada. This regulated the hunting season to three and a half months of the year. The hunting regulations currently in place are for shooting season limits and bag limits in relation to the amount of birds currently in the population. A quota system was put in place in 1960 to regulate the number of geese shot in a given year.

One subspecies, Aleutian-Canadian Geese, were listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1967. This was due to the introduction of a non-native arctic fox species to their nesting islands. They became predatory on the naturally defenseless geese. This introduction caused the population to decline to approximately 800 individuals; however, in 1990, due to increasing numbers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service changed the listing to threatened. The state of Alaska also changed the species listing from endangered to a species of special concern. Aleutian-Canadian geese are now recorded around 15,000 individuals and nesting on eight islands.

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Cicada Mania About to Begin — Grab Your Ear Plugs!!!

They're coming! Billions of periodic cicadas, the loudest of all insects, are about to descend on parts of the U.S., including Nebraska, after spending 17 years underground. And when they arrive in late-May, it will sound like a perpetual buzz saw has invaded the community. Here are some quick facts from the National Wildlife Federation about these amazing and very noisy creatures.



Seven Quick Facts About Cicadas

- The group that is emerging this year, Brood X, is thought to be the largest of all the 17-year cicada broods.
- Periodical cicadas are found only in the United States east of the Great Plains. Brood X will affect DE, GA, IL, IN, KY, MD, MI, NC, NJ, NY, OH, PA, TN, VA, WV.
- This year's brood will arrive in early May and be around through mid-June.
- Periodic cicadas look noticeably different from the dog day cicada that most people are familiar with. They have red eyes and are mostly black with orange-veined wings.
- The 17-year life cycle of the periodic cicada is the longest of any insect.
- The noise you hear is the male singing to attract females. He makes the sound by vibrating membranes on the side of his body, underneath his wings.
- Cicadas emerge when the soil temperature exceeds 64 degrees Fahrenheit.

Lifecycle of the periodic cicada

EMERGING: After spending 17 years underground, periodic cicada nymphs construct exit tunnels through the soil and crawl up on a tree or weed stem.

TRANSFORMING: Soon after, the cicada's skin splits down the back, and they shed their shells. The brown casings left behind are called 'exuviae.'

MATING: Male cicadas begin producing calling songs and form choruses to attract females.

LAYING EGGS: After mating, the female cicada makes a series of slits on the underside of a twig and lays her eggs.

HATCHING: After they hatch, the young nymphs drop to the ground where they burrow into the soil and feed on the sap of tree roots for the next 17 years.

The Truth About Cicadas

Fiction: Cicadas are locusts.

Fact: Locusts are migratory insects related to grasshoppers. Cicadas are most closely related to aphids and leafhoppers. Cicadas are NOT locusts.

Fiction: Cicadas are dangerous.

Fact: Cicadas do not bite, sting or otherwise attack humans. They do not carry disease and they do not swarm. They may bump into you just as they would a tree or stone as they go about their business of finding mates, avoiding predators, and laying eggs. Aside from the noise they make, cicadas should not bother you at all.

Fiction: Cicadas will destroy your yard.

Fact: Young trees with small branches may suffer some damage as females lay their eggs, but you can loosely wrap these trees in cheesecloth to keep out female cicadas and prevent damage.

Five Fun Facts

1. The male cicada makes the loudest sound in the insect world. If you stand right next to him, it would sound as loud as a power lawn mower.
2. Once they emerge, males live above ground for about two weeks, females for up to six.
3. Periodic cicadas are able to achieve population densities of up to 1.5 million per acre because of their ability to avoid predators during their lengthy stay underground. This is known as 'predator satiation.'
4. Female cicadas lay 400 to 600 eggs in as many as 40 to 50 nests before they die.
5. The transparent wings of cicadas are said to block out UV rays.

When asked about the noise level that cicadas create, NWF entomologist Gabriella Chavarria Ph.D. says "The noise you hear is the male cicada singing to attract a female mate. For these guys, mating only happens once in their lifetime, and they only have two weeks to do it after waiting 17 years. You would be loud too under those circumstances." (Reprinted from www.enature.com— a web site service of the National Wildlife Federation.)

Help Our Native Wildlife—Volunteer Your Time With NWRI!
(continued from page 1)

Fundraising – Volunteers with creative ideas are constantly needed to insure that we have the funds to care for our wildlife. Our animal caretakers often are too busy with animal care to be able to actively raise funds. If you have energy and ideas, please consider helping us raise money for NWRI.

Volunteer Coordinator – Currently our team leaders recruit and train their own volunteers. We would like to find a person or persons to respond to public interest, actively recruit volunteers, and possibly even help train them. If you have ideas regarding this position, or would like to build it from the ground up, please give us a call!

Public Educators – NWRI Team Leaders are constantly receiving requests for public speakers from schools and civic organizations. Currently we receive more requests than we are able to satisfy. If you have knowledge of our native wildlife, or would like to learn, and enjoy working with children and adults, you may want to consider this position. You can speak once a year, or ten times a year, depending on your interests and schedule.

If you are interested in any of these positions, please call Laura Stastny at 402-960-4366 or Phyllis Futch at 402-871-6761. Thank you for your interest!



**Yes, I want to volunteer
and help our animal friends!**

Name

Street Address

City

State

Zip

Telephone

I would be willing to help with:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> fund raising | <input type="checkbox"/> publicity/PR |
| <input type="checkbox"/> membership | <input type="checkbox"/> special projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> programs | <input type="checkbox"/> education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> supplies | <input type="checkbox"/> cage building |
| <input type="checkbox"/> newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> animal care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: | |

Please mail this form to:

**Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc.
P.O. Box 24122**

Featured: Canada Goose (Continued from Page 4)

On the other hand, some populations have grown so numerous, there are many organizations who are trying to regulate the populations of these geese. They see this as necessary because if the goose population continues to rise at its current rate, they will present a very serious problem to their surrounding environment in only a few years. Other organizations believe that the methods and ideas of these organizations are cruel and unnecessary. These groups believe that the growing population is not nearly as threatening as some believe and that they are actually at great risk because of the excessive hunting and death by pesticides that geese populations experi-

ence. A chemical called methiocarb is being used on grass to prevent geese from grazing on it in some areas. Methiocarb makes the geese feel sick, but thus far has not resulted in any deaths. The toxic effects of this chemical are still being researched. Over 200 geese have been killed by the chemical parathion in Texas. Golden Eagles and Bald Eagles have been seen eating the bodies of the geese that have been killed by parathion which means it could potentially be very dangerous for them as well.

Adopt a Wild Animal Today!

Your adoption fee will assist NWRI in the care of the animal of your choice. It will help defray the costs of food, caging, bedding, and veterinary care, as well as educational programs that are designed to increase awareness of Nebraska's wildlife and the environmental issues we face today.

We appreciate your support! In addition to the knowledge that you are assisting Nebraska's native wildlife, your adoption fee provides you with a photograph of an animal in NWRI's care, our newsletter (published quarterly) for the year in which your donation was received, and a certificate of adoption.

Consider this....

** The cost to operate NWRI's raccoon team was \$2,800 last year!

** A single operation to repair the fractured leg of a red fox can cost \$600-800.

** NWRI spends over \$2,000 on formula alone for the mammal babies that are raised each year.

** The animals in rehabilitation eat over 10,000 pounds of dry foods, and thousands of pounds of produce each spring/summer season.

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Adoption Fee</u>
Songbird, Bat	\$25
Squirrel, Rabbit, Opossum	\$35
Woodduck, Canada Goose	\$50
Raccoon, Woodchuck	\$75
Fox, Coyote, Bobcat	\$125



Adopt An Animal Today!

I would like to adopt a(n) _____.
Enclosed is my adoption fee of \$ _____.

This is a gift. Please send the adoption kit to:

Your Name

Name

Street Address

Street Address

City State Zip

City State Zip

Telephone

Please sent this completed form to:
Nebraska Wildlife Rehab, Inc.
PO Box 24122
Omaha, NE 68124-24122

