

Wild Geese

— Part 2 —

by Bob Elgas
Big Timber, Montana

The Brant Family

Within the brant family are five well defined species. As is the case with true geese, they enjoy wide distribution throughout the northern hemisphere. The five species consist of Canada geese, the true Brant, the Barnacle Goose, Red-breasted Goose, and the Hawaiian or Nene Goose.

The Canada Goose is certainly the best known of all North American species. It is found throughout much of North America where at least 11 sub-specific races have been recognized. These range in size from the very large Giant Canada Goose, which has been recorded with weights in excess of 20 pounds, to the tiny Cackling and Aleutian Canada Geese weighing as little as three or four pounds. All races of Canada Geese are marked alike. The head and neck is black with the familiar white cheek patch. As is true with all members of the brant family, feet and bills are black. The body color ranges from gray to brown, depending upon sub-species and, as is true with most geese, the pigmentation is darker on the back than on the underside. During recent years, certain races of Canada Geese have enjoyed a substantial increase in population. This is largely as a result of their capability to adapt to an environment which has a close proximity to humans. As an example, they are fond of golf courses, where they are frequently encountered in substantial numbers. The tender green grasses and waterways are much to their liking, and they don't hesitate to partake of an inviting environment.

The true Brant are represented by four sub-species. These are the Atlantic Brant, the Pacific or Black Brant, the little known Laurence's Brant and the Russian Brant. Brant are unique among geese in that they are almost exclusively marine in habit. Other than when they come ashore during the nesting season, almost their entire life is spent upon salt water. They feed upon marine vegetation, especially

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eel grass, which is a great favorite. In captivity, they graze on green grass and adapt to a terrestrial environment exactly like other geese. Brant are small, weighing three to four pounds. General plumage color is black and white. Although they are not brightly colored, they are dainty and graceful and pleasing in appearance.

The Barnacle Goose is medium to small. It breeds in Iceland and Spitzbergen and winters on the west coast of Europe, especially in Scotland and the British Isles. They are largely black and white with a substantial patch of white on the head and face. The name Barnacle Goose originated in a most unusual way. They were described long ago before bird migration was known. Observers of that time only knew the geese disappeared in the fall and re-appeared the following spring. The disappearance in the fall was explained by the possibility that the population simply disappeared and perhaps died. This did not explain the re-appearance in the spring until an enterprising observer of the time "discovered" that geese were produced by Barnacle trees! Barnacle trees, it was explained, produced barnacle shells. As these shells matured and ripened, they would split open allowing the contents to be released. Those contents that fell upon the ground came to naught. However, the contents that fell upon the water would develop and become Barnacle Geese, thus the species was able to perpetuate itself. Verification of this remarkable phenomenon was authenticated by eye witness accounts, including sketches and drawings of the actual event. It was not until much later, as bird migration became known, that it was realized Barnacle Geese actually spent their summers and reared their young in Iceland and Spitzbergen and returned to their winter home in Britain and Europe with the arrival of the fall. Old tales can die hard, and the story of Barnacle trees is still remembered today. The name Barnacle Goose has endured and, perhaps — just perhaps — maybe a few Barnacle Geese, indeed, do still come from Barnacle trees.

One of the most beautiful of all waterfowl is the tiny Red-breasted Goose of Russia. As is true with others of the clan, there is considerable black and white feathering. However, in addition there is a considerable

amount of red, which is unusual in wild geese. The intricate patterns, especially on the head and neck, are impossible to describe. The color patterns, diminutive size, and graceful bearing make the little Red-breasted Goose truly magnificent. They breed in northern Russia and winter in southern Europe. The total population of Red-breasted Geese is not large, possibly not more than 5,000 individuals.

One of the most interesting of the clan is the Hawaiian or Nene Goose. As the name implies, it is native to Hawaii, and has become non-migratory. It has adapted to the high lava flows of the islands and has become almost entirely terrestrial. As a result, the feet and legs have evolved to fit the environmental change. The legs are much longer and heavier than those of other geese, and most of the webbing has disappeared from the feet as befits a bird adapted to walking rather than swimming. Feet and bill are black, and there is black feathering on the head. General plumage pattern is buffy to brownish gray. They are very handsome. The history surrounding the Nene is quite interesting. There are a number of speculations regarding their origin. One that has an element of credence, and considerable acceptance, is that they originated from a common ancestor to the Canada Goose when individuals of that race made their way to the Hawaiian Islands, became non-migratory residents, and evolved into the Hawaiian Goose as we know it today. Historically, the Hawaiian Goose was comparatively abundant. However, when early traders introduced such predatory species as pigs, goats, rats and especially the mongoose, the Hawaiian Goose populations began to decline. By the mid-1900s, the population had been reduced to approximately 50. Fortunately, a few had been maintained in captivity by a private individual in Hawaii. From that source, Peter Scott of the Wildfowl Trust in England obtained three birds. As a result of that acquisition, the Trust was able to embark upon a successful breeding program. Ultimately, handreared birds from that program were sent to breeders in the United States where further breeding success was achieved. Eventually Hawaiian Geese were reared in sufficient numbers to return the birds for release

back into their native habitat in Hawaii. Unfortunately, restrictive legislation has prevented efforts on behalf of the Hawaiian Goose from being successful as might have been possible. Despite the fact it does nothing to protect Hawaiian Geese in their native lands, restrictive legislation has been enacted which prevents aviculturists in the continental United States from fulfilling their potential to breed them in captivity. Fortunately, Hawaiian Geese are easily propagated in captivity, and it is estimated as many as 3,500 captive birds exist. If restrictions could be made more realistic, the number would increase dramatically. The full story is too involved for inclusion here. However, it has been well documented in an article authored by Walter B. Sturgeon, Jr., which was featured in the June/July 1990 issue of *Watchbird*. Those interested in the history of the Hawaiian Goose are referred to that article.

Wild geese adapt well to captivity and their requirements are quite easily met. Geese are essentially grazing animals and fresh, tender green grass is a basic food. Captive birds should be provided with supplemental food. Whole grains, such as wheat and corn, provide needed nourishment in winter when green grass might be in short supply. As an additional supplement, commercial rations prepared for chickens or turkeys are also good. In feeding such rations, it is important to avoid medicated varieties. Although geese are more terrestrial than ducks, they are still waterfowl. At least some water area should be available and, indeed, if geese are to be bred successfully, swimming water is a requirement. Actual copulation is accomplished in the water, and without it any eggs produced will not be fertile. The term swimming water is often misunderstood. The amount of water need not be large — just enough that both birds can float themselves at the same time. A pool as little as four feet across and six inches in depth will suffice. Geese are territorial during breeding season and if more than one pair is in a single pen the dominant pair will assume control. In larger areas, where there is an expanse of space and water, a number of pairs can be kept together. Geese are very hardy and weather and temperature fluctuations present little problem. Exclusive of Hawaiian



Though seldom known, the endangered Hawaiian goose, Nene Goose, belongs to the Brant family and is not a true goose.

Geese, which have acclimated to what is essentially a tropical climate, geese handle cold very well. Indeed, sub-zero temperatures hold little fear, especially if open water is available. Hawaiian Geese are not acclimated to cold and must be protected from sub-freezing conditions.

Geese normally form permanent pair bondings. Once mated, a pair will remain faithful to one another. However, if one or the other of the pair for any reason should be lost, the remaining bird will usually remate. Breeding is seasonal and is largely triggered by weather conditions and the length of daylight hours. Most geese will nest during April and May. At an appropriate time, the female (known as a goose; males are ganders) will scratch out a depression in the ground. With help from the male, she will gather nearby dry material, usually dry vegetation, which is the basis for the nest. Eggs are usually deposited on alternate days. As each egg is deposited, it is covered with dry nesting material until the clutch is complete. A normal clutch is five, but the number can vary either way. Once complete, the female lines the nest with a blanket of down plucked from her own breast. Incubation is done by the female alone but the gander stands close by and protects her and the nest. Incubation periods vary according to species.

Larger species take 28 to 30 days, and smaller species somewhat less. Inasmuch as incubation is not initiated until the full clutch is complete, the goslings hatch at the same time. The young are precocious and as soon as they are dry they are ready to leave the nest and follow their parents. In the wild, the young subsist almost exclusively on tender green grasses. In captivity, it is wise to provide some supplemental feed in the form of a good poultry ration. Chick or turkey grower works well. It should be non-medicated, and the protein level should not be much above 16 percent. It is worthy of note that the digestive system of geese is geared to the intake of large quantities of low protein, high roughage food. Supplemental foods are much more concentrated which needs to be taken into account in the feeding program. It goes without saying that being waterfowl, they will consume, and need to consume, large quantities of water.

When goslings are incubator hatched, or taken from the parents for handrearing, certain provisions are necessary for their well being. One of the first requirements is to be certain they are kept warm and dry. Of necessity, they will have to be confined to a pen area sufficiently well constructed to prevent them from wandering off and becoming lost. Food and water

utensils will need to be provided. Shallow pans work well for food, and chick watering founts will suffice for water. Open water containers are ill advised. If given the opportunity, goslings will get directly into the water and can easily soak themselves, causing chilling and frequently death as a result. Water containers should be designed so the chicks can drink, but cannot get into the water. Appropriate water founts can be obtained at any poultry or feed store.

When placing food and water containers in the pens, they should be spaced sufficiently far apart that the babies must walk from one to the other to feed and drink. If placed close together, they will dabble first in one and then the other, making a mess of themselves, the water and the food dishes.

When handrearing goslings, it is important they be kept warm. They must also be provided with shade from hot sun. It is important to protect them from cold showers or rain. When left with the parents, of course, this is no problem as the parent birds will cover and brood them when necessary. At night, handreared babies will need to be either brought inside where appropriate warmth can be provided, or, if left outdoors, they must have adequate protection from the elements and proper warmth must be provided. In most instances, it is ill advised to leave them outdoors at night as marauding predators are an inevitable possibility for tragedy. Far better to bring them in and be sure than to gamble they will be safe outdoors.

For those who have appropriate accommodations, wild geese are a splendid addition to an aviary. In addition to being relatively easily maintained, they are also highly ornamental and adapt very well to an association with humans. Perhaps one of the most pleasant surprises of all, particularly for those who are familiar with the price structure of some of the psittacines, is the fact that a pair of comparatively rare geese can be purchased for as little as two or three hundred dollars. In view of the adaptability of geese to an avicultural facility, the natural grace and beauty of the birds themselves, the ownership of a pair or two of these fine birds can add much enjoyment to an avicultural collection. ●

Avian Trade Shows & Seminars

Carolina Ornamental Bird Society

Bird Swap, Sale and Raffle

April 9, 1994

from 7:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

Craven County Fairgrounds

Hwy. 70 east of New Bern, NC

For information call:

Ken Bradley (910) 842-9245

Bird Clubs of Virginia

sponsor the

10th Virginia Bird Convention & Bird Mart

April 9-10, 1994

National speakers, bird care mini seminars, huge

bird mart, bird sale room, giant raffle.

Omni International Hotel at Waterside

777 Waterside Dr., Norfolk, VA

Call (804) 622-6664

For info call Dick Ivy, (804) 898-5090

Greater Dayton Bird Expo and Auction

April 10, 1994

Montgomery County Fairgrounds

Dayton, Ohio

For information contact:

Paula or Pete DiSalvo (513) 848-4819

15 W. Franklin St., Bellbrook, OH 45305

Way Out West Bird Expo,

Arizona's Biggest Bird Mart

April 17, 1994

State Fairgrounds

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Everything from finches to macaws,

cages, feed, bird toys and more.

\$3.50 adults / \$2.50 seniors

\$1.50 children 5-12

For vendor info: (602) 973-9282

Buffalo Hookbill Association

3rd Annual Exotic Bird Show

April 17, 1994

10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

in the Grange Bldg.

Erie County Fairgrounds, Hamburg, NY

For info. call: (716) 496-6046

5th Annual America's Family Pet Show

at the Fairplex - Pomona, California

Los Angeles County Fairgrounds

April 22-24, 1994

Birds, dogs, cats, fish, reptiles, pigs, llamas, etc.

For info. contact Tom H. McLaughlin,

Western World Pet Supply Assn.

406 South First Ave., Arcadia, CA 91006-3829

Phone (818) 447-2222 • Fax (818) 447-8350

Madison Area Cagebird Assn. of Wisconsin

(M.A.C.A.W.)

presents its

7th Annual Bird Fair

May 1, 1994

Dane County Forum Exposition Center

Madison, Wisconsin

Vendors, hourly raffles, morning seminar.

For info. call:

Rita Shimniok (608) 798-4877

For table rental call:

Jennifer Dobson (608) 241-2635

Macaw Landing Foundation

Public Viewing Aviary

Third Thursday of each month

Jantzen Beach Center, exit 308 off I-5

Mon. - Fri. 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Sat. & Sun. 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Bird care seminar. Speaker Pat Huff, D.V.M.

Macaw Landing 7:30 p.m.

For information call: (503) 288-0882

Tennessee Valley Exotic Bird Club

presents its

6th Annual Spring Exotic Bird Fair

May 6 & 7, 1994

Knoxville Convention Center

World's Fair Park

For information call:

Barb Kimmitt (615) 693-7841 or

Sandi Brennan (615) 753-9841

or write to TVEBC, P.O. Box 51425

Knoxville, TN 37950-1425

The TVEBC is the host club for the

AFA '94 August 4-6 Convention.

Prepare yourself for a good time!

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club

Spring Bird Fair

May 7, 1994

Hattendorf Center

10:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

225 E. Elk Grove Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL

Half mile east of Arlington Heights Road

For information call: (708) 705-6260

Northwest Exotic Bird Society

sponsors the

Washington Exotic Bird Fair

May 7, 1994

Puyallup Fairgrounds

Puyallup, Washington

10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

For information call:

Susan Hoyer (206) 441-0360

Family Pet Show

Detroit, Michigan

May 13, 14, 15, 1994

See more than 300 exhibitors,

hundreds of animal handlers,

4000 pets and 200 barnyard dwellers

at the

Michigan Exposition and Fairgrounds

Contact: Jerry Schoenith (810) 777-0369

Portland's Rose City Exotic Bird Club's

Spring '94 Bird Expo and Sale

May 14 and 15, 1994

Washington County Fairgrounds

Hillsboro, Oregon

For information contact:

Louise Dube, P.O. Box 1016, St. Helens, OR 97051

or phone (503) 366-0161

Arizona Aviculture Society

Spring Bird Mart

May 15, 1994

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Admission: \$3.00

New location: 38th St. & Thomas, Phoenix

Vendors welcome

(602) 957-6034 or 973-0667

National Capital Bird Club's

Annual Bird Mart

May 15, 1994

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

John C. Wood Complex

3730 Old Lee Highway

Fairfax, VA 22030

For information:

P.O. Box 5, Libertytown, MD 21762

(301) 898-5965 or (703) 471-1231

West Pasco Exotic Bird Club's

Fifth Annual Bird Fair

May 15, 1994

from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

at the Hudson Community Club

Hudson, Florida

For information call:

Jackie (813) 863-7217 or Cindy (813) 868-0521

Central New York Caged Bird Club

Spring Sale and Exhibition

May 21, 1994

Great Northern Mall

Route 31, Clay, NY

For information contact:

Dave Dixon (?) 598-5927

or Debbie Johnson (?) 598-5024

3rd Annual Upper Midwest Bird Mart

May 21, 1994

Minnesota State Fairgrounds

Empire Commons Building

St. Paul, Minnesota

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Admission \$3, and under 12 \$2

For information contact:

P.O. Box 20601, Bloomington, MN 55420

Call Nellie (612) 854-6439

or Dallas (612) 427-1046

Central Mississippi Bird Club

presents their

2nd Annual Bird Fair

May 21-22, 1994

Miss. State Fairgrounds

Jackson, Mississippi

For information contact:

W. Nations (601) 825-7809

Mary Moore (601) 924-1180

Candy Lott (601) 924-3893

Central Pennsylvania Cage Bird Club

Bird Mart & Pet Bird Show

May 22, 1994

Holiday Inn, Grantville, PA

located at the Hershey-Harrisburg Exit #28,

off I-81 at Route 743

For information call:

Janet Landvater, bird mart mgr.

RD #1, Box 135-K, Hershey, PA 17033

Phone (717) 533-4251

Middle Tennessee Cage Bird Club

presents its

Bird Fair

May 28, 29, 1994

at the Middle Tennessee State University Campus

Agriculture Pavilion-Livestock Center

Murfreesboro, TN

Contact Fair Chairman: Larry Crawford

1447 Twin Oak Dr., Murfreesboro, TN 37130

Phone (615) 890-6906

Greater Rochester Hookbill Association

Sale and Auction

June 4, 1994

10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Admission free

Genesee Conservation League

1570 Penfield Rd., Penfield, NY 14526

For information write:

GRHA, P.O. Box 427, Penfield, NY 14526-0427

or phone: Gloria Giraulo (716) 342-9529 or

Linda Matteson (315) 597-4836

Avian Trade Shows & Seminars

Gold Country Avicultural Society
presents its

3rd Annual Exotic Bird Mart
June 12, 1994

Mother Lode Fairgrounds, Sonora, CA
For vendor information, write:
Gold Country Avicultural Society
P.O. Box 3692, Sonora, CA 95370-3692
Attn: Rodney P. Silva
or call (209) 533-3496

Erie Cage Bird Club's
4th Annual Bird Fair
June 18, 1994

Perry Hiway Hose Co.
Route 19, Erie, PA
Public welcome, no admission charge
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Info: Sue Turner (814) 838-1858
or Debbie Foote (814) 967-2866

American Federation of Aviculturists
20th Annual Convention

August 4-6, 1994

Knoxville, Tennessee
Hosted by Tennessee Valley
Exotic Bird Club
Holiday Inn/Convention Center,
Worlds Fair Park
Seminar topics:

"Out of African and Down Under"
Speakers from Africa, Australia, Canada and the
United States.

The Convention will take place on Friday and
Saturday and have exhibitors from all over the
United States. Don't miss this once-in-a-lifetime
opportunity to meet with some of the world's top
aviculturists.

For more information:
Cindy Aident (615) 690-7252 or
Gary Reid (615) 690-0613

Mid-South Budgie Club
will host a

Budgie Bird Show
August 20, 1994

Quality Inn-Executive Plaza
823 Murfreesboro Road, Nashville, TN
For additional information:
Candice Patrick, Apt. B3-7,
400 Forrest Park Road, Madison, TN 37115
Phone (615) 868-8840 or
Carrol Dunn, 115 Chippendale Drive,
Hendersonville, TN 37075
Phone (615) 324-8642

Mid-South Budgie Club
will host a

Bird Fair
August 21, 1994

Quality Inn-Executive Plaza
823 Murfreesboro Road, Nashville, TN
For information contact:
Mary Russell
416 West Cherry St., Glasgow, KY 42141
Phone: (502) 651-8150

Central Alabama Avicultural Society
presents its

Annual Show & Fair
September 3 - 4, 1994

Howard Johnson Governors House Hotel
2705 E. South Blvd., Montgomery, AL
Hotel reservations: 1-800-334-8459
For information call:
(205) 857,3817, (205) 892-2204, or (205) 279-6829

Chester County Bird Breeders
and **Keystone Cockatle Club**

Annual All-Bird Show
September 10, 1994

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Sheraton Valley Forge
Convention Center, Plaza Entrance
Valley Forge, PA
For information contact:
Doris Rickards (215) 647-4632
For directions call:
Sheraton Hotel (215) 337-2000

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club
Spring Bird Fair

September 17, 1994

10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Hattendorf Center
225 E. Elk Grove Blvd., Elk Grove Village, IL
(1/2 mile east of Arlington Heights Road)
Semi-annual event, open to the public.
Features a wide variety of birds, cages, toys, seed, treats,
and equipment for sale.
For everyone from single pet owners to serious breeder/
hobbyists.
General information: (708) 705-6260

Erie Cage Bird Club's Annual Auction
September 18, 1994

2306 Norcross Rd., Erie, PA
Public welcome, no admission charge
Starting at 1:00 p.m.
For info.: Diane Holtz (814) 898-2675

Coastal Bend Cage Bird Club's
5th Annual Bird Fair

September 25, 1994

9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Moose Lodge, 8001 S. Padre Island Dr.
Corpus Christi, Texas
For more info:
Linda Young (512) 991-2704

South Jersey Bird Club
Bird Show

October 1, 1994

Garden State Park Racetrack
Cherry Hill, New Jersey
Open to the public: 10 - 6
Judging, educational seminars, vendors, DNA sexing, bird
sale room, and more.
For more information, contact:
Bob Hence, show manager (609) 753-8949

Avicultural Society of Tucson (Arizona)
Ninth Annual Bird Fair

October 16, 1994

Tucson Exposition Center,
Marketplace, USA, Irvington Road
9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Demonstrations, lectures, raffles
(hand-fed bird grand prize).
Contact Su Egen, P.O. Box 41501,
Tucson, AZ 85717-1501
Phone & fax: (602) 325-0009

Connecticut Association for Aviculture
presents its

18th Annual Exotic Bird Show
October 22, 1994

"Tails-U-Win" Hall
175 Adams Street, Manchester, CT 06040
For information call:
Show Secretary Chris Voronovitch
at (203) 649-8220

Exotic Bird Club of Florida
Bird Show

October 29, 1994

Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Resort
1300 N. Atlantic Ave.,
Cocoa Beach, FL 32931
Reservations: (407) 783-2271
For information contact:
Maureen O'Steen
613 Dianne Dr., Melbourne, FL 32935

Middle Tennessee Cage Bird Club
hosts its annual

Fall Show/Fair Extravaganza
October 29-30, 1994

Nashville, Tennessee State Fairgrounds
Creative Arts Building
One day judged show - Sat., Oct. 29
Show chairman Bill Hite (615) 643-2617
runs simultaneously with a
two day sale/fair Oct. 29-30.
Fair chairmen:
Wilma Crawford (615) 890-6906 or
Joy Johnson (615) 895-3386

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club
62nd Annual Cage Bird Show

November 5, 1994

12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
Rolling Meadows Holiday Inn
3405 Algonquin Rd.,
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
Phone (708) 259-5000
Judges:

Type Canaries - Harold Sodamann
Hartz Canaries - Harold Sodamann
American Singer Canaries - Mike Bacon
Colorbred Canaries - Ignacio Perea
Finches & Softbills - Brian Binns (England)
Lovebirds - Lee Horton
Hookbills - Ray Johnson
Budgerigars - Don Langell
American Cockatiel Society - Carl Helton
National Cockatiel Society - Lee Horton
Juniors - to be announced

National Finch & Softbill Society Regional Show and the
Border Breeders of Chicago All Border Show will be held in
conjunction with our show this year.
General information: (708) 705-6260

Way Out West Bird Expo,
Arizona's Biggest Bird Mart
November 13, 1994

State Fairgrounds
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Everything from finches to macaws,
cages, feed, bird toys and more.
\$3.50 adults / \$2.50 seniors
\$1.50 children 5-12
For vendor info: (602) 973-9282

Alamo City Bird Mart

"Biggest Little Bird Mart in Texas!"
December 10, 1994

10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Live Oak Civic Center
8101 Pat Booker Rd., off Loop 1604
24,000 sq. ft. of breeders cages and supplies,
seminars, microchipping clinic, raffle.
For vendor info call: (210) 648-0788
or send for space application:
2611 Tucker, San Antonio, TX 78222