MIGRATION OF CANADA GEESE THROUGH CLINTON COUNTY, NEW YORK

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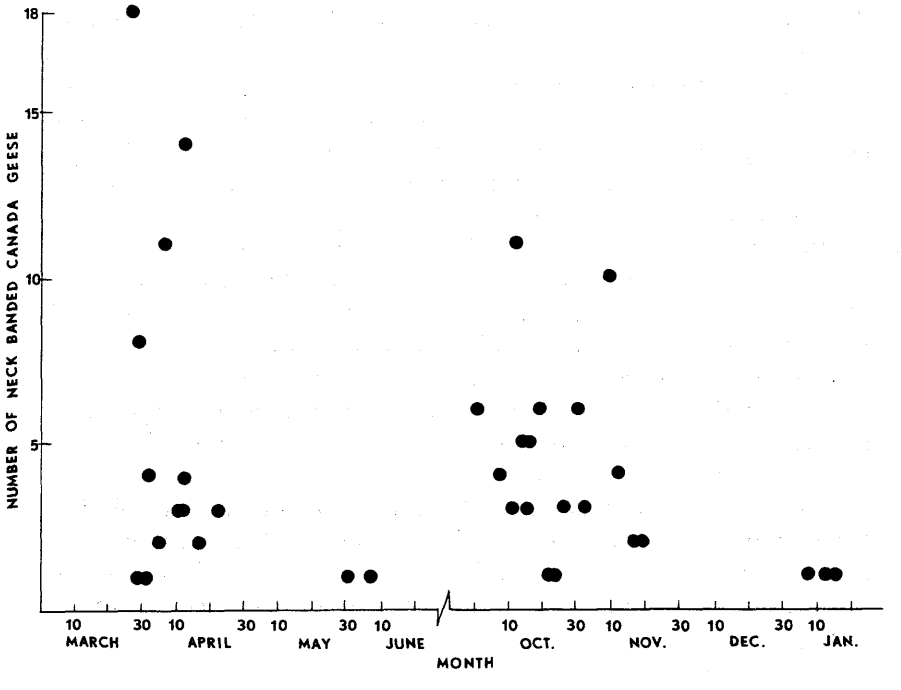
Clinton County lies in the most northeastern corner of New York State. It borders the province of Quebec, Canada on the north, Lake Champlain on the east, and its southwestern portion lies within the Adirondack Park.

With the exception of a brief period between 15 January and 25 February, Canada Geese have been reported in Clinton County throughout the year (Gretch 1985). These extreme dates (departure and arrival dates) are of limited usefulness. It would be more helpful to know the peak period of spring and fall migration. The neck banding of Canada Geese in the Atlantic flyway by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and eight states in the Atlantic flyway was a perfect opportunity to learn more about the dynamics of Canada Geese migration in Clinton County.

Biologists with these state agencies trapped over 25,000 geese and marked them with three inch wide yellow neck collars. Each of the collars had a unique black number and letter code printed on the collar to identify each bird. During the springs of 1984 through 1989 I observed 76 collared geese. During the falls of 1984 through 1989 (excluding the fall of 1987) I observed 78 collared geese. Figure 1 shows when these collared geese were observed. Peak spring migration occurs on 8 April, with all but two sightings between the dates of 28 March and 23 April. Peak fall migration occurs on 26 October with all but three sightings between the dates of 1 October and 19 November. It appears that Canada Geese are in more of a hurry to get to their breeding grounds in spring than they are to get to their wintering area. Most of spring migration occurred within 27 days, whereas the fall migration was a more leisurely 50 days' period. The data in graph 1 concurs with what others have found, that the 35°F isotherm appears to be a predictor of the speed at which geese move north in spring (Lincoln 1935). On 30 March the 35°F isotherm is near Glens Falls, N.Y. If we assume that spring advances northward at one degree latitude (69 miles) in four days (Kudish 1975), it would be near the U.S.-Canada border approximately on April 7.

Table 1. Neck banded Canada Geese

State	Total Sightings	Spring Sightings	Fall Sightings	Total Banded	Sighted Banded
New Jersey	28.8	39.2	18.1	8.6	3.35
Pennsylvania	21.2	14.9	27.8	10.4	2.04
Delaware	18.5	10.8	26.4	9.1	2.03
New York	15.8	14.9	16.7	21.0	0.75
Maryland	7.5	6.8	8.3	31.9	0.24
Virginia	5.5	8.1	2.8	6.8	0.81
N. Carolina	2.1	4.1	0	9.1	0.23
S. Carolina	0.7	1.4	0	3.2	0.22



The letters on the neck collars enable one to determine where each bird originally had been collared. Table 1 shows the breakdown according to state. The percent of total (spring and fall) sightings by state, in decreasing order, are of birds banded in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. The next two columns in Table 1 show that the mix of birds from each state differ between the spring and fall flights. In spring the mix includes a higher percentage of birds from New Jersey, Virginia, North and South Carolina. In fall the mix has a higher percentage of birds from Pennsylvania and Delaware. There is about an equal split between spring and fall of geese banded in the states of New York and Maryland.

The percent of Canada Geese neck banded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was not divided equally between the eight Atlantic flyway states. The fourth column of Table 1 shows the percent of Canada Geese banded in each state. The last column shows the ratio of total sightings (column 1) to the total banded (column 4) as a correction for the above inequity. This column shows that for all bird sightings (spring and fall) more geese than expected percentage come from the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware. Fewer than expected come from the states of Maryland, North and South Carolina.

I had only three cases of repeated fall sightings of the same bird and none for the spring. Only in two cases did I obtain both spring and fall sightings of the same bird. The bird I have the most data on was J47P, which hatched someplace in the vast subarctic of Canada in 1982. It was collared on 16 January 1984 in New Jersey. I saw it for the first time on 18 April 1984. Almost 6 months to the day from 16-24 October, I observed it again at Lake Alice Wildlife Management Area. The next spring our paths failed to cross but between 20 October and 17 November 1985 I found him back at Lake Alice W.M.A. This was almost one year to the day from the previous fall sighting. The other two repeated fall sightings I have also show the same regularity of migration. Both geese were observed about on the same date in two different years.

In some quarters Canada Geese are designated a problem species. Some think there are too many. I like to believe that these huge flocks of Canada Geese each spring and fall are the grandest wildlife spectacle on this continent. I would like to see their numbers multiply further.

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