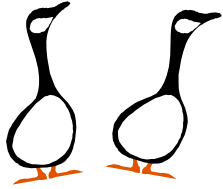


Field Notes

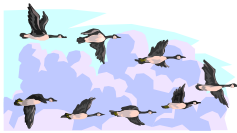
Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

October 2006



Did you know?

That a group of geese in flight is called a skein.



That a group of cormorants is called a gulp.



That a group of bats is called a colony.



That a group of grasshoppers is called a cloud.



Migration

Migration is a miracle. By land, air and water, millions of species do it, in time with the seasons. Fully one-third of the world's birds are migratory. Weather and hunger forced even our ancient ancestors to participate on annual trips. Can you imagine putting on weight and walking to Florida for the winter, living off the land along the way? Yet this is exactly what happens each fall and spring, with creatures such as butterflies, fish and birds.

Historically, the Greek Aristotle believed birds hibernated for the winter, but the Italian King Frederick discovered in 1250 the basic nature of migration through careful observation of the spring and fall excursions of cranes, herons and geese. Since then, scientists have gathered an enormous collection of information on migration, but remarkably, much remains a complete mystery.

We know that birds and other animals find their way using navigational clues of the heavens (such as the position and movement of the sun, moon and stars), landscape features (coastlines and mountains), and even the earth's magnetic field. Wind and water currents provide great assistance in speeding movements, especially for heavy birds such as ducks and geese, but storms can also wreck havoc and destroy countless migrants.



We also know that the common trigger to prepare for and initiate travel is the changing hours of daylight, mediated by the eyes, brain, and glands. Travel is direct and almost frantic in the spring, a race to breed on an unclaimed piece of habitat, and usually more leisurely on the return voyage, in the fall.

But migrating is dangerous and exhausting, so why take the chance? The answers appear to relate to higher levels of survival and numbers of offspring by traveling to other regions rich in food supplies and breeding territories. Climate, such as Canada's winters, dictates that the summer range may become completely inhospitable in winter for most species. Perhaps this movement between summer and winter ranges became instinctive in response to the successive advances and retreats of glaciers and vegetation zones during the many ice ages.

Field Notes

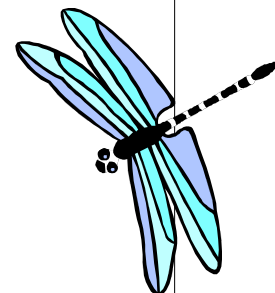
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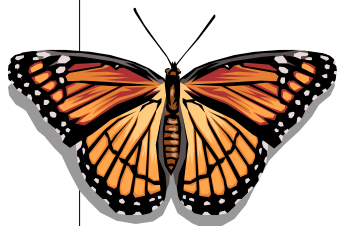
Migration cont'd

The data bank on migration is packed with unbelievable facts — butterflies flitting from Canada to Mexico, lobsters marching in long lines across the ocean floor, eels swimming from the Sargasso Sea in the mid-Atlantic to rivers in Europe and North America, Arctic Terns flying almost from pole to pole, and Snow Geese able to make the secondary hop from James Bay to the Gulf Coast non-stop in 16 hours, flying at an elevation of over 6 km (20000 feet).



Oak Hammock Marsh is one of the major stops for many ducks, geese and shorebirds. It is a safe place for the birds to feed and put on fat for the next leg of the journey.

Shorebirds show up in mid-July and are here until mid-September. Geese and ducks, however, begin to show up in early September and are here until mid to late October. Estimated peak numbers of waterfowl (ducks & geese) during the last two weeks of September and the first week of October over Oak Hammock Marsh is approximately 400,000 birds.



Most of the billions of birds now winging their way south through Manitoba are on a pathway called the Mississippi Flyway; the others being the Central, Atlantic and Pacific flyways. Who can resist the urge to look up and wonder, when the noisy "Vs" of waterfowl pass overhead? We are witnessing something wild and primitive in our civilized world — one of Mother Nature's miracles.

Waterfowl Numbers at Oak Hammock



	2000		
	Sept 22	Oct 6	Oct 20
Ducks	60 000	100 000	91 000
Canada Geese	50 000	110 000	95 000
Snow Geese	5 000	50 000	65 000

	2001		
	Sept 21	Sept 28	Oct 5
Ducks	100 000	80 000	30 000
Canada Geese	65 000	110 000	67 000
Snow Geese	43 000	36 000	25 000

	2002		
	Sept 20	Sept 27	Oct 11
Ducks	58 000	60 000	102 000
Canada Geese	55 500	86 000	127 000
Snow Geese	3 500	27 000	111 000

	2003			
	Sept 17	Sept 24	Oct 3	Oct 22
Ducks	60 000	80 000	80 000	24 100
Canada Geese	15 000	75 000	158 200	96 600
Snow Geese	1 000	19 000	64 100	65 000

	2004				
	Sept 13	Sept 24	Oct 8	Oct 15	Oct 22
Ducks	50 000	116 000	141 200	142 000	76 000
Canada Geese	10 000	93 000	145 900	130 000	160 000
Snow Geese	1 000	20 000	34 600	122 000	159 000

	2005				
	Sept 21	Sept 28	Oct 5	Oct 12	Oct 19
Ducks	73 000	144 300	45 000	24 200	13 500
Canada Geese	42 400	100 500	61 800	61 100	40 300
Snow Geese	23 000	43 000	30 500	15 900	15 000



Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre is a joint project of
Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Province of Manitoba

