

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

March 2008

SPRING MIGRATION

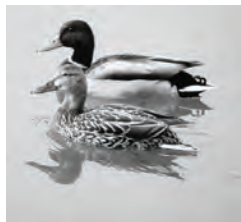


March is the time when you start to wish that winter would just be over already. You get the warm days and then you get the cold days, then you wait for the last snow storm of the season. But one thing that always marks the coming of spring is hearing the call of the Canada Goose.



These Geese, flying in their famous “V” formation are following the melting snowline to find their favourite nesting spot. This migration will take a couple weeks because they stop to feed and rest along the way. They fly in family groups as the first year goslings need to be taught where to nest.

Mallards are one of the first ducks to appear in Manitoba in the spring. When they arrive, they are looking for nesting territory. The female will usually nest close to where she was born and some will even keep going back to the same territory year after year.



There are many birds that make their way from the warmth of the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern Hemisphere. Birds migrate in the winter because food is scarce or non-existent. They migrate north in the spring because there is not enough food for the adults and offspring of both the native birds and the migratory birds.

Even Humpback Whales in the Pacific Ocean are getting ready to move. They are heading north from the warm waters of Hawaii to the cold waters off the coast of Alaska where there is an abundance of food.

Did you know?

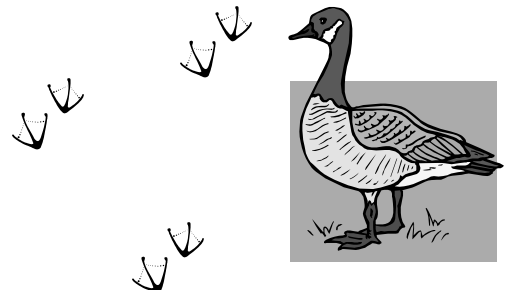
Many species of waterfowl will nest in the same area where they were born.



Birds will travel faster when migrating north to their breeding grounds than in the fall.



Canada Geese fly up to 1000 km a day! That's about the distance from Winnipeg to Calgary.



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SPRING CONTINUED

Some research has been done to find out exactly how animals can navigate their way back and forth from their summer breeding grounds to the place where they overwinter.

Salmon use their sense of smell to locate and return to their favourite stream. Migratory animals, such as caribou, use well trampled trails and their sense of smell to get them home.

Migratory birds such as, Canada Geese and Mallards, look to the sky for answers. They are believed to use the stars, sun, and geographic features as guides. Fog at night is a big problem for those birds who migrate during that time. Day migrants use the sun and geographic features such as shorelines to help them home.



Some studies have shown that birds follow “Toucan Sam’s” advice and follow their noses. More particularly the magnetite in their noses allowing them to follow the Earth’s magnetic field.

During spring migration, the fat supplies for a species is larger than during fall migration. This provides the bird with more energy to fly longer distances all at once and for females to be able to produce eggs quickly once they have arrived.

Oak Hammock Marsh is in the centre of three major flyways for migratory birds, the Mississippi, the Atlantic, and the Central. Birds use these for both the fall and spring migrations. The spring migration does not have the same numbers, gathering at once, as the fall migration, as different birds tend to migrate north at different times.



Snowy Owls migrate to southern Manitoba in the fall and in March, will migrate back up to the arctic where they will spend the summer.



Geese are the first birds to migrate back this way followed by hawks and ducks. Migration may take up to three months depending on the species of bird.



Shorebirds start their migration in late April and do not finish until late in June. But when July comes around, these birds are getting ready to make that long trek back south.



All birds are different during migration. Some evidence shows that some birds fly individually, such as the Killdeer, early in the season. Some fly in mixed family groups, such as the Mallard. But all have one goal in common, to make it to their nesting grounds.



Come to Oak Hammock Marsh this spring and welcome our feathered friends back!

