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The introduction and naturalisation of birds

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Population trends and ecology of the Canada goose *Branta canadensis* in Flanders, Belgium

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In 1992, VLAVICO (The Flemish Avifauna Commission), in collaboration with the Institute of Nature Conservation (IWRB section), launched 'Project Honker', a study on population trends and ecology of the Canada goose *Branta canadensis* in Flanders (Anselin, Geers & Devos 1993). There are only two published records of Canada geese in Belgium before 1962. Records increased slowly following the hard winter of 1962-63 which prompted large-scale movements of geese to France from across north-west Europe. The first recorded breeding of Canada geese in Belgium took place in the early 1970s as a result of escapes from a waterfowl collection at Essen. Despite the release of Canada geese being illegal in Belgium, the population has increased rapidly over the past ten years and there have recently been complaints of localised agricultural damage.

The 1994 breeding population was estimated at 150-200 pairs and the wintering population at 1200-1500 individuals. The main breeding concentrations are around Gent (Oost-Vlaanderen) and the northern part of Antwerp. There are few predators of Canada geese nests and breeding success is high, with about five young fledged per breeding pair. Canada geese in Belgium prefer to nest on small islands in ponds with good vegetation cover (in parklands), and in undisturbed areas, corners isolated by broad ditches or wet patches in open meadow land. A first analysis of ringing data reveals movements of more than 40 km between breeding and wintering sites. The largest known winter roost near Gent holds up to 800 birds, although numbers fluctuate (Anselin & Geers 1995).

Anselin, A., Geers, V., & Devos, K. 1993. Projekt Honker: een Vlavico-IWRB onderzoek naar het broed-en wintervoorkomen van de Canadese gans *Branta canadensis* in Vlaanderen. *VLAVICO Nieuws*, 6(3): 3-5.
Anselin, A., & Geers, V. 1995. Wat bracht de winter 1994-1995? *VLAVICO Nieuws*, 8(1): 6-7.

