

## FIRST BREEDING RECORD OF FREE-RANGING CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis* IN GREECE

### Prvo opazovanje gnezdenja prostoživeče kanadske gosi *Branta canadensis* v Grčiji

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North American Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* were introduced to England from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Following to translocations to reduce large flock size and introductions in Scandinavia between the 1930s and 1960s, feral populations spread over southern England, northern Europe, and into Russia and Ukraine (NIETHAMMER 1963, KIRBY & SJÖBERG 1997, BOYD & DICKSON 2005). In Central Europe, where the expansion was possibly accelerated by Scandinavian birds wintering in Denmark and northern Germany, breeding numbers have increased since the 1980s. Naturalized populations in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany are currently estimated at some 8,900–14,100 breeding pairs (KIRBY & SJÖBERG 1997, BAUER & WOOG 2008).

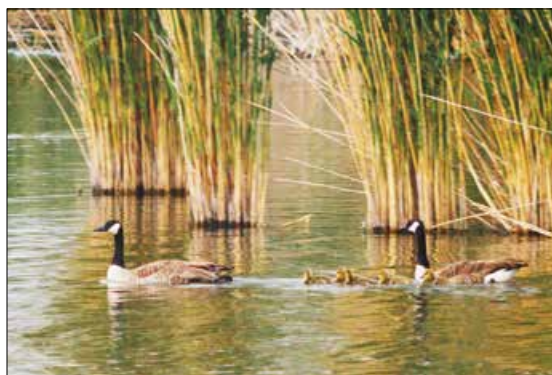
To the south of its European range, i.e. in France, Switzerland, southern Germany and Austria, smaller and widely scattered populations remain largely based in urban areas and artificial wetlands, like reservoirs and gravel-extraction pits (KIRBY & SJÖBERG 1997, SABATHY 2001, MAUMARY *et al.* 2007, BAUER & WOOG 2008), while throughout southern Europe and the Mediterranean region the species occurs only as an accidental migrant and winter visitor. Aside of local escapees, apparently wild birds have been reported from Spain (CRAMP 1977, but cf. FRANSSON & PETERSSON 2001), Italy (ANDREOTTI *et al.* 2001, BRICHETTI & FRACASSO 2003) and Slovenia (KOREN 2010).

Following to the current distribution of feral populations outlined above, and the lack of records of wild birds, we were surprised to come across a family of Canada Geese in NW Greece. During stormy and rainy weather we were bird-watching from the road between Longades and Amfithea (39°40'38"N, 20°54'17"E, 477 m a.s.l.), which is running parallel to the northern shore of Lake Ioannina, in the late afternoon of 9 May 2011. Approximately halfway between both villages, i.e. 0.9 km and 2.2 km from

the nearest permanent human habitations, a pair of Canada Geese guarded five goslings in the open waters between shoreline and extended patches of high reeds. Both parents were obviously alarmed when we stopped the car beside the road, and within minutes slowly escorted the goslings into denser reeds.

The later analysis of photographs of both adult birds produced no evidence for recently escaped birds, like clipped wings, damaged or heavily worn flight and tail feathers, while on the left legs, which could be seen on some pictures, both adults showed no rings (Figure 1). Although the subspecies introduced to Europe remains doubtful and considerable overlap of body size and coloration between races, the large size, long neck and elongated bill and head shape of both adults rule out smaller subspecies with more stubby head profiles that have been recently split from Canada Goose as the polytypic Cackling Goose *B. hutchinsii* (BOYD & DICKSON 2005). The rather pale overall coloration, white breast, extended white on cheeks with a small extension posteriorly, and small patches of white feathers on the forehead and around the eyes of the rear bird in Figure 1 hint at the subspecies *moffitti*, which according to some authors includes the race *maxima* (A.W. Schorger in PALMER 1976). Although breeding farms operate with hybrids and birds of dubious origin, European feral populations may originally descend from geese of the subspecies *interior* and *maxima* (NIETHAMMER 1963, BOYD & DICKSON 2005).

Additionally, the downy plumage of the goslings precisely matches the table as well as descriptions for *B. canadensis* in PALMER (1976) and BOYD & DICKSON



**Figure 1:** Family of Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Lake Ioannina between Amfithea and Longades, NW Greece, 9 May 2001 (photo: P. Sackl)

**Slika 1:** Družina kanadske gosi *Branta canadensis*, jezero Ioannina med Amfitheo in Longadesom, SZ Grčija, 9.5.2001 (foto: P. Sackl)

(2005). According to A.W. Schorger, except a fading of coloration to dirty grey, goslings show few marked changes in appearance during the first two weeks after hatching. Therefore, following to body size and the rather dark and fresh coloration of the goslings, we estimated their age at  $\leq 10$  days (Figure 1).

So far we know the municipality of Ioannina has imported Canada Geese for ornamental purposes. Thus, although the family we saw on Lake Ioannina most probably originates from local releases, our observation constitutes the first breeding record of apparently free-ranging Canada Goose in Greece and for the Balkan Peninsula (HANDRINOS & AKRIOTIS 1997, KIRBY & SJÖBERG 1997, HELLENIC RARITIES COMMITTEE 2011, J. HÖLZINGER *pers. comm.*). The Hellenic Rarities Committee has accepted the record as the species "*Branta canadensis*" and included it in Category E.

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### Povzetek

Naturalizirane populacije kanadske gosi *Branta canadensis* gnezdiijo v SZ in severni Evropi v večjem številu že od sredine 20. stoletja, medtem ko so bili prostoživeči osebki na območju Sredozemlja zabeleženi le kot naključni gosti na selitvi ali v zimskem času. Dne 9.5.2011 je bila družina kanadskih gosi s petimi mladiči, starimi  $\leq 10$  dni, opazovana na jezeru Ioannina v SZ Grčiji. Pri obeh odraslih osebkih ni bilo videti nobenih znakov nedavnega pobega iz ujetništva, kot so prirezana krila, poškodovana letalna in repna peresa ter sledovi obročkov. Grška komisija za redkosti je potrdila opazovanje kot prvi primer gnezdenja prostoživečih kanadske gosi v Grčiji in ga uvrstila v kategorijo E.

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