

Atlantic Population Canada Geese: Current Status

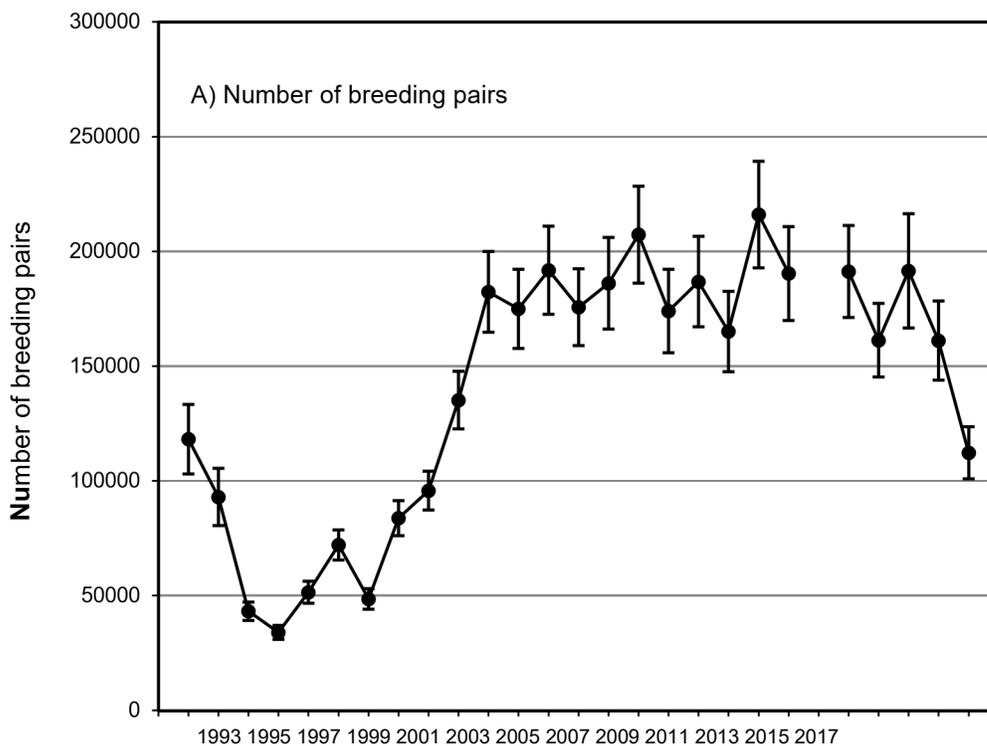
November 2018

Background:

Atlantic Population (AP) Canada geese nest in northern Quebec, predominantly along Ungava Bay and the eastern shore of Hudson Bay. This population winters from New England to South Carolina, with the largest concentrations generally found in the Delmarva and Chesapeake Bay Regions. In Virginia, the AP winters predominantly in the eastern portion of the state, with smaller numbers wintering in the Northern Piedmont.

There are several monitoring programs used to assess the status of this population. These include a breeding pair survey conducted on the Canadian nesting grounds in the spring of each year, a leg-banding program conducted each summer to band the breeding adults and their broods, and the harvest and parts collection surveys obtained from hunters during the hunting seasons.

Following a number of years of relative stability, the breeding population (estimated from the spring breeding pair survey) fell sharply from 161,000 in 2017 to 112,000 in 2018 (see graph below).



This decline was a result of very poor nesting conditions that included snow and ice cover late into the summer. Very few geese were able to nest and produce young. The banding efforts conducted this summer confirmed these results, as almost no goslings were observed. Over

3,000 geese were captured during the banding operations, but only 30 of these birds were young of the year. This is the lowest production of young birds in the twenty-year history of this banding program. In a typical year, there are around 2 juveniles banded for every adult goose. This year there was only 0.01 young per adult in the banding efforts. In addition, annual productivity of this population has been below average for 5 of the past 6 years.

Harvest Strategy and Current Management Options

The Harvest Strategy for AP Canada Geese consists of 3 regulatory alternatives (Liberal, Moderate, and Restrictive) that are based on the number of breeding pairs (3-year average) counted on the breeding grounds survey. In the Chesapeake Region, a “Liberal” season of 60 days with a 2 goose/day limit is recommended when the pair count exceed 225,000 pairs, a “Moderate” season (50 days with a 2 goose/day limit) is recommended when the pair count is between 150k – 225k, and a “Restrictive” season (30 days with 1 goose/day) is recommended when the pair count is below 150k.

Hunting season regulations for all migratory game birds, including Canada geese, are now set in the spring of each year, before the current year’s population status and productivity has been evaluated. When the 2018-19 AP goose season was set in April 2018, the 3-year breeding pair average (2015-2017) was 171,300. Therefore, the hunting season established for this year (2018-19), was the “Moderate” option of 50 days with a 2-geese daily limit. This will not be changed, and the hunting season this year will continue as advertised.

However, there is concern that the poor production this year will result in a harvest of mostly adult geese, and that the number of breeding pairs in the population will continue to decline. Therefore, at their meeting in September 2018, the Atlantic Flyway Council recommended moving to a restrictive hunting season package for AP Canada geese in the 2019-20 season. This recommendation was forwarded to the USFWS, who will set the framework for 2019-20 season in January of 2019. If adopted by the USFWS, this framework will restrict the AP goose season in Virginia in 2019-20 to 30 days with a 1-geese daily limit. The Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries will propose our AP goose season dates in Virginia (based on this expected 30 day, 1 goose/day framework), along with our other migratory game bird hunting seasons, at our January 2019 Board meeting. A public comment period will then be held from February to March 2019, to gather input on this season, and a final decision will be made by the Board at their April 2019 meeting.

Note that this potential regulation change **only applies** to the Atlantic Population (AP) Zone in Virginia. Regulations for the September Canada goose season, and the other Canada goose hunting zones (SJBP and Resident zones) will not be affected by this change and will likely remain the same as last year.