



## GOOSE FACT SHEET



**KINGDOM:**  
Animalia

**PHYLUM:**  
Chordata

**CLASS:**  
Aves

**ORDER:**  
Anseriformes

**FAMILY:**  
Anatidae

**SUBFAMILY:**  
Anserinae

**GENERA:**  
Anser, Branta, Chen, Cereopsis, Cnemiornis  
(extinct)

Goose is the name for a considerable number of birds, belonging to the family Anatidae. This family also includes swans, most of which are larger than geese, and ducks, which are smaller.

True geese are medium to large birds, always (with the exception of the Néné) associated to a greater or lesser extent with water. Most species in Europe, Asia and North America are strongly migratory as wild birds, breeding in the far north and wintering much further south. However, escapes and

introductions have led to resident feral populations of several species.

A pair of geese will get together to raise a family and, for the most part, will stay together the rest of their lives (up to 25 years), raising new families each year.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of geese is that they form a giant "V" across the sky. This amazing trick actually helps each bird fly further than if flying alone. When a goose falls out of formation, she will feel the drag and move quickly back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front of her. When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back into formation leaving another goose in the front position. They even honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

Geese have very strong affections for others in their group (known as a gaggle). If one in the gaggle gets sick, wounded, or shot, a couple of others may drop out of formation and follow the ailing goose down to help and protect him.

They try to stay with the disabled goose until he dies or is able to fly again, then they catch up with the group or launch out with another formation.

Much of a goose's time is spent foraging for food, most of which is obtained by grazing. All geese eat an exclusively vegetarian diet.

They honk loudly and can stretch their long necks out to great length when scared or threatened.

Ducks and geese are wild animals, but they have domesticated counterparts who are raised for their eggs and meat, down and feathers. They're less commonly known as farm animals, yet they can certainly fall within this category.

Geese have been domesticated for centuries. In the West, farmyard geese are descended from the Greylag, but in Asia the swan goose has been farmed for at least as long.

Geese tend to lay a smaller number of eggs than ducks. However, both parents protect the nest and young, which usually results in a higher survival rate for the young geese, known as goslings.

A group on the ground is called a gaggle. When flying, a group of geese is known as a wedge or a skein.

### **FOIE GRAS:**

The methods used to turn duck and goose livers into the "delicacy" known as *pâté de foie gras* are anything but delicate. Foie gras is a French term meaning "fatty liver" and it is produced by force-feeding birds. The ducks and geese force-fed for foie gras are compelled to consume much more high-energy food—mostly corn—than they would eat voluntarily. This damages their liver and often kills them. The Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare for the European Union found many examples of abuse as a result of force-feeding, including:

- Birds are routinely confined to small cages or crowded pens.
- Birds are force-fed tremendous amounts of feed via a 12- to 16-inch plastic or metal tube, which is shoved down their throats and attached to a pressurized pump.
- The force-feeding may be performed twice daily for up to two weeks for ducks and three to four times daily, for up to 28 days for geese.
- Force-feeding causes the liver to increase in size about 6-10 times compared to the normal size for a bird.
- Increased liver size forces the abdomen to expand, which makes moving difficult and painful. An enlarged abdomen increases the risk of damage to the stretched tissue of the lower part of the esophagus.
- Force-feeding results in accumulated scar tissue in the esophagus.
- The liver can be easily damaged by even minor trauma.



In 1992, the HSUS sent a veterinarian to investigate a New York State foie gras producer, which resulted in a police raid and cruelty charges against the farm. Necropsies taken of the dead birds revealed many painful conditions: The force-fed birds had chronic heart disorders; ruptured liver cell membranes; cirrhosis; traumatic esophagitis; and lesions in their gizzards and intestines. Dead birds were found with food filling their esophagi and spilling out of their nostrils.

Ducks and geese are social animals who suffer when confined in individual cages. The confinement also can lead to lesions of the sternum and bone fractures, as well as foot injuries from the cage floors. Ducks and geese also suffer when they're not allowed enough water to swim and preen, which they do naturally in the wild.

Originally, all foie gras came from France, but now the United States has gotten into this cruel niche industry. Next time you go into a store or restaurant that sells foie gras, please let them know that a product that comes from force-feeding ducks and geese is more than you can stomach.