

GIANT CANADA GOOSE IN WASHINGTON

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On 4 December 2004 Granstrand found and photographed Washington's first fully documented Giant Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) of apparently wild origin near Yakima, Yakima County (Figure 1). On 15 January 2005 he found another at Ice Harbor Dam, Walla Walla County (Mlodinow et al. 2005). Figure 1 shows that the bird at Yakima had white extending back from the top of the cheek patch as well as a white bar across the forehead. Both marks typify *maxima*, though occasionally other subspecies of the Canada Goose display them, as do some intergrades (Hanson 1997). Additionally, *maxima* is typically somewhat whiter breasted than *B. c. moffitti* (Hanson 1997), the common large Canada Goose of Washington and surrounding states and provinces (Johnsgard 1975, Bellrose 1976), and this is evident in Figure 1. Also detectable in the photograph is that the white cheek strap meets the base of the bill. This mark is often present in *maxima* and is atypical of other taxa (B. Jones in litt). Granstrand also noted this bird's being larger than the nearby examples of *moffitti* and its proportionately longer neck (not readily evident in the photograph because of the bird's posture), both features suggesting *maxima* (Hanson 1997).

In 1957, *maxima* was thought to be extinct, with a former breeding range said to extend from North Dakota and Minnesota south to Kansas, northern Arkansas, Tennessee, and western Kentucky (A.O.U. 1957), and perhaps north to Alberta and Manitoba (Hanson 1997). In January 1962, however, Hanson (1997) found numerous examples of *maxima* in the vicinity of Rochester, Minnesota. A large and successful reintroduction effort ensued. Giant Canada Geese now breed from northern Manitoba south through western South Dakota to southern Illinois and Missouri, though the exact extent of its range is obscured by extensive intergradation with other races of the Canada Goose, partly as a result of these restoration programs (Johnsgard 1975, Bellrose 1976, Mowbray et al. 2002). Since 1962 numbers of the Giant Canada Goose have increased rapidly, with Bellrose (1976) estimating 20,000 wintering in the Tennessee Valley and 8000 in the Mississippi Valley, plus a few along the Atlantic coast. The subspecies' total population was estimated at 800,000 in 1993, 1,400,000 in 2001 (Mowbray et al. 2002), and 1,583,100 in 2005 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2005). *Branta canadensis maxima* is nonmigratory in the southern half of its range, but the more northerly populations are migratory, including a molt-migration that takes birds north to the shores of Hudson and James bays (Mowbray et al. 2002).

In the Pacific Northwest, a private individual introduced the Giant Canada Goose into northwestern Oregon during the 1930s (Marshall et al. 2003), and government agencies introduced it into southwestern Washington during the 1970s (Wahl et al. 2005). Neither population became established, partly because of extensive interbreeding with local *B. c. moffitti* and, to a lesser extent, introduced *B. c. occidentalis* (Marshall et al. 2003, Wahl et al. 2005). There are no known introductions or vagrants of wild origin of *maxima* in Montana (D. Casey, J. Hansen in litt.) or Idaho (D. Trochlell in litt.).

The bird photographed in December 2004, however, was almost certainly not the first *B. c. maxima* of wild provenance in the Pacific Northwest. Between 1985 and

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2001 Schonewald (unpubl. data) harvested 11 large (8.5–10 kg) Canada Geese within Washington's Columbia Basin, near Moses Lake, Grant County (four on 29 November 1986; one on 30 December 1989; two on 20 November 1993; one on 1 January 1994; three on 21 November 1998). By size alone these birds were probably *maxima*, as these weights fall outside the range of *B. c. moffitti* (Yocum 1972, Hansen 1997). Each also displayed the head markings characteristic of *maxima* discussed above, and each had a pink or pinkish undersurface to the mandible, a mark indicating *maxima* (B. Jones in litt.). Schonewald noted that these exceptionally large geese gave a call deeper than that of *B. c. moffitti*, the common large Canada Goose of Washington. All were taken from family groups, implying a wild rather than captive origin. None of the specimens, however, was preserved. Finally, a Canada Goose banded in South Dakota (where only *maxima* breeds) on 15 July 1974 was recovered near Vancouver, British Columbia, on 9 October 1982 (Tallman et al. 2002).

The recent upsurge of interest in subspecific identification of the Canada and Cackling Geese (the latter split as *B. hutchinsii*; Banks et al. 2004) led Granstrand to scrutinize Canada Geese in eastern Washington during the winter of 2004–2005 and notice the two examples of *maxima*. This race is not rare in captivity (M. Axelrod, P. Dye in litt.), but the historical evidence of individuals shot from family groups during the last 20 years and the recovery of a banded bird in southwestern British Columbia suggest that *B. c. maxima* may be a natural vagrant to eastern Washington. Its frequency may be on the increase.

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Figure 1. Giant Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis maxima*) near Yakima, Washington, 4 December 2004.

Photo by Denny Granstrand

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