

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release May 12, 1974

McGarvey 202/343-5634

ENDANGERED CANADA GEESE RELEASED ON ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

Forty-one endangered Aleutian Canada geese were released into the wild on Agattu Island in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska recently, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Lynn A. Greenwalt announced.

"We hope to afford this rare species a new lease on life," Greenwalt said. "Man's activities in years past were the primary reason for its near-extinction. Today we hope to reverse that situation and have man play the major role in restoring this beautiful, mysterious goose to its traditional haunts. This bird's migratory patterns have taken it as far away as Japan and down the west coast of the United States."

The 41 geese released reached breeding age of two and three years at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. The nucleus of the captive breeding flock was established in 1963 when 18 goslings were picked up from the Aleutian Islands after it became evident the species was threatened with extinction. Today the captive breeding flock numbers 18 breeding pairs.

Between 1966 and 1973 over 200 Aleutian Canada geese have been raised at Patuxent. The recent release of 41 is to be followed next year by another release of about 60. Seventy-five Aleutian Canada geese were released in March 1971 on Amchitka Island, but were only seen there for six weeks. It is not known what fate befell them.

The flock released recently, since it was raised in captivity, may not have the wild migratory instinct common to wild Aleutian Canada geese. To offset this disadvantage, a family group of wild Aleutian Canada geese from Buldir Island in the Aleutians will be placed on Agattu with the new arrivals in hope that they will assume flock leadership and teach the newcomers to migrate during autumn when the urge will rise. Close daily observation of the flock will be maintained throughout the summer by Fish and Wildlife Service biologists. The birds are banded for identification if they should be recovered in the future.

At one time Aleutian Canada geese were abundant along the rocky islands of the Aleutian chain. The arctic fox, introduced onto the islands for fur

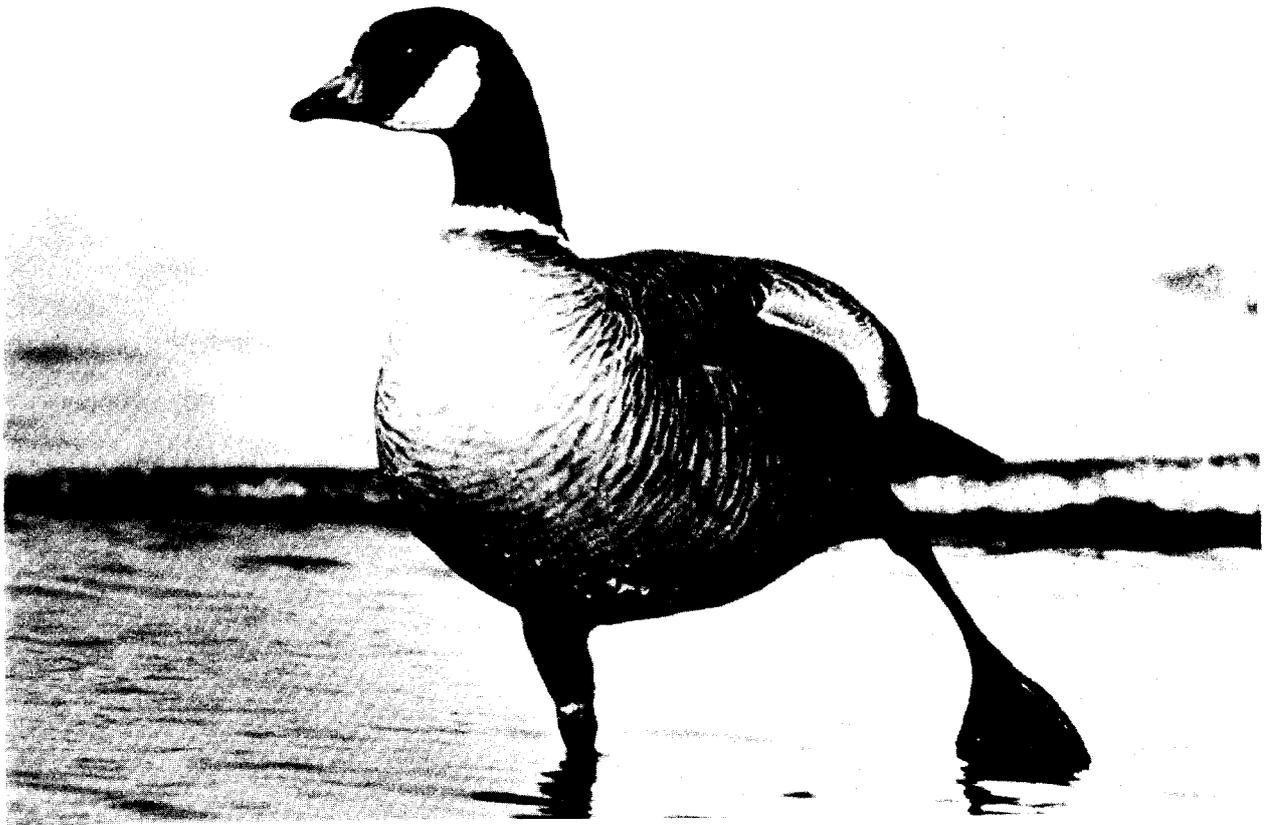
(over)

production, flourished because it had no natural enemies and an ample supply of food including the Aleutian Canada geese and other abundant island wildlife.

At present there are only about 300 of these geese left in the wild, limited to Buldir Island. There are no foxes on Agattu Island where the geese were released, wing feathers clipped to temporarily prevent flight, so their chances for survival are good.

The Aleutian Canada goose is one of 10 subspecies of Canada geese. It is a very small goose weighing about five pounds. It can be distinguished because it has a broad white band at the base of its black neck and the most tapered bill of any race of Canada geese. With the present breeding flock at Patuxent, Fish and Wildlife Service biologists hope to be able to hatch and raise about 100 Aleutian Canada geese a year.

x x x



The Aleutian Canada Goose is distinctive because of its tapered bill and white ring at the base of its neck. It weighs only about five pounds.