

CALLING ALL CANADAS...

By George T. Kammerer III

Building and installing your own nest platforms for Canada geese

You, too, can be a part of California Waterfowl Association's (CWA) Canada Goose Program by building and installing your own goose nesting platforms – and with less effort than you might think. There are literally dozens of nest platform designs that have been developed; however, after having built and installed goose nests for more than 20 years, I have found the following design to be the most durable, lowest in cost, and (most importantly) most preferred nesting platform (by the geese). Its originator is a gentleman named Bob Heard from Alturas, California. Bob has been assisting CWA's Canada Goose Program for over a decade and has built and installed close to 500 of these nests on thousands of acres of ideal habitat in Northeastern and Central California.

In Bob's honor, I'd like to pass on his nest design to all CWA members. One of the best things about Bob's design is that these nests have the potential to last 20 to 30 years after a single installation and to produce literally hundreds of goslings each over their working life with little or no maintenance – even in the coldest of California climates. Here is everything you need to build and install one or more goose nest platforms yourself:

MATERIALS

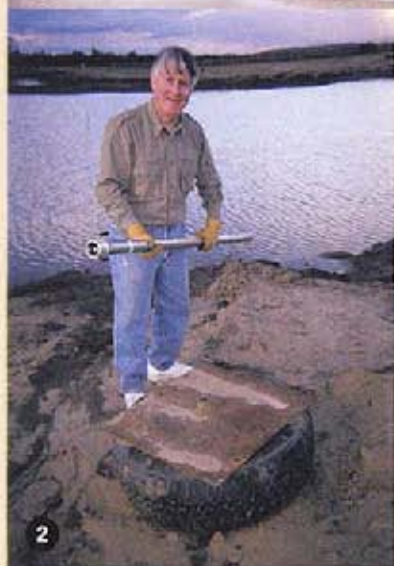
- six- to eight-foot long sections of $\frac{3}{4}$ ", 1", or 1- $\frac{1}{2}$ " hollow galvanized steel pipe, threaded on one end
- Threaded galvanized steel couplers (sized to match the pipe)
- Steel plates – $\frac{3}{8}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick and 24" by 24" wide is an ideal size
- Threaded one- to two-inch-long galvanized bolts with matching round washers, lock washers, and nuts
- WD-40, Break Free or other durable, rust-inhibiting lubricant
- Used automobile or light truck tires (medium to large-sized work well) – split in half or whole

CONSTRUCTION

1. Weld one coupler to the center of the bottom of the steel plate, threads pointing out (see photo 1).
2. Drill three to four holes in the steel plate located so they will line up with the tire sidewalls.
3. Drill tire sidewalls on one side to line up with the holes in the steel plate (see photo 2)
4. Bolt the tire onto the top of the steel plate using these holes (on the opposite side from the welded threaded coupler), using large washers to hold the tire to the plate. On the opposite side (bottom) of the plate, use the lock washers and nuts to secure the bolts.
5. Drill three to four evenly spaced holes one inch or larger in diameter in the bottom tire sidewall. (These will drain the tire quickly and thoroughly when it rains to avoid drowning or chilling the eggs.)
6. Cut a 6" by 6" square out of one side of the tread section of the bolted-down tire using a hacksaw. (This is very important in order to allow an escape route for the newly hatched goslings)

INSTALLATION

1. Stand the steel pipe vertically (threaded side up) at your installation location. Installation above or below the waterline works equally well. Spray the threads with lubricant. Using two pipe wrenches, screw a threaded coupler securely (but not too tightly) over the threads to temporarily protect them during installation (see photo 3). Then, using a metal fence post pounder (see photo 4), pound the steel pipe (threaded coupler-side up) into the ground to a depth that will hold it securely (12" to 18" below ground level works well in most soil types).
2. Using two pipe wrenches, unscrew the coupler from the pipe carefully to avoid any damage to the threads



on the pipe. Again, spray the pipe threads thoroughly with lubricant.

3. Pick up the goose nesting platform with the tire bolted onto it (two people can do this easily, but one young buck can often do it alone). Holding the platform tire-side up, VERY CAREFULLY line up the threads within the welded-on coupler on the platform bottom with the threads on the top of the pipe. Being very careful not to cross-thread them, slowly rotate the platform so that it screws down onto the pipe. Once it starts to grab the threads on the pipe and is clearly threaded correctly, you can spin the platform until it cranks down securely onto the pipe and is seated as far as it will go. Hand-tighten the platform so that it will not loosen or unscrew from the pipe in strong winds (see photo 5).

4. Fill the tire on the top of the platform with dry, clean (not moldy) straw or hay (see photo 6). You may need a ladder to do this, depending upon the length of the pipe. Tuck the straw or hay under the rim of the tire so that it will not blow out. Use plenty of straw to fill the tire about three-quarters full. It will compact with "goose use," and some always blows out. Straw or hay will need to be replaced each spring. (Note: You can reverse the order above and fill the tire with straw or hay before you crank it onto the pipe. This is my preferred way of doing it, as no ladder is then needed and the platform is all ready to go as soon as it is screwed down tight onto the pipe.)

Timing of nest installation is very important. If you want to place them below the waterline of a pond, lake, or marsh, installation in September, October, or even early November on a dry pond bottom (before winter rains refill the pond) can be ideal. Otherwise, installation in December, January, or February is just fine – but no later than February 10. By mid-February, most geese will already have established nesting territories and will not use new platforms that are installed later than that. Straw or hay should be replaced in exist-

ing platforms no later than February 10 for the same reasons described above.

In later winter, if there are no geese in the immediate vicinity at the time of installation, it is not uncommon for it to take a few days to a week for the birds to find your nest. If there are geese on your pond watching you install the platform, however, stand back! Once humans back away from a newly installed nest, it is not uncommon for a pair of geese to fly right up on the platform and claim it as their own within just minutes or hours of installation – right before your eyes! I have witnessed this personally many times during installations in early Feb-



ruary. Don't despair if young geese lay eggs but abandon them. Geese don't make good parents until age 4 or 5.

Now, sit back, relax, and let Mother Nature take her course. Typically eggs will be laid and incubation will commence in late February or early March with most goslings hatching from between late March and late April. Goslings grow quickly, typically doubling their size every 15 days, and arriving at flight stage in June or July. The adult pair of geese typically molt and re-grow their flight feathers during a two-week window in June which coincides with the final two weeks of growth of the juveniles' flight feathers. Both adults and young are able to fly at the same time.

Building and installing Canada goose nest platforms is a great hands-on project for kids and adults alike. It is ideal for a school, Eagle Scout, family, group, or community project. You will find it immensely satisfying to raise



your "own" flock and will have a lot of fun in the process! Good luck and thank you in advance for your efforts to assist CWA's Canada Goose Program. 🦢