A person is silhouetted against a blue background, carrying a large bag on their back. In the background, there is a forest and a street lamp. The overall scene is misty or foggy.

Sandrine Schaefer
skein

skein is a series of participatory art walks through public spaces along the eastern United States where large populations of geese and humans gather. Unfolding over one year, *skein* follows a migration path taken by Canada geese from New England to the Carolinas and centers the annual life cycle of an average goose. During these walks, participants engage in creative exercises that address and challenge widespread beliefs about geese, draw attention to goose gathering behaviors, and reimagine how humans can be in relationship with these other-than-human neighbors. By exploring everyday encounters between humans and geese, *skein* centers a non-anthropocentric point-of-view in places built for human passing and recreation to celebrate our interspecies entanglements.



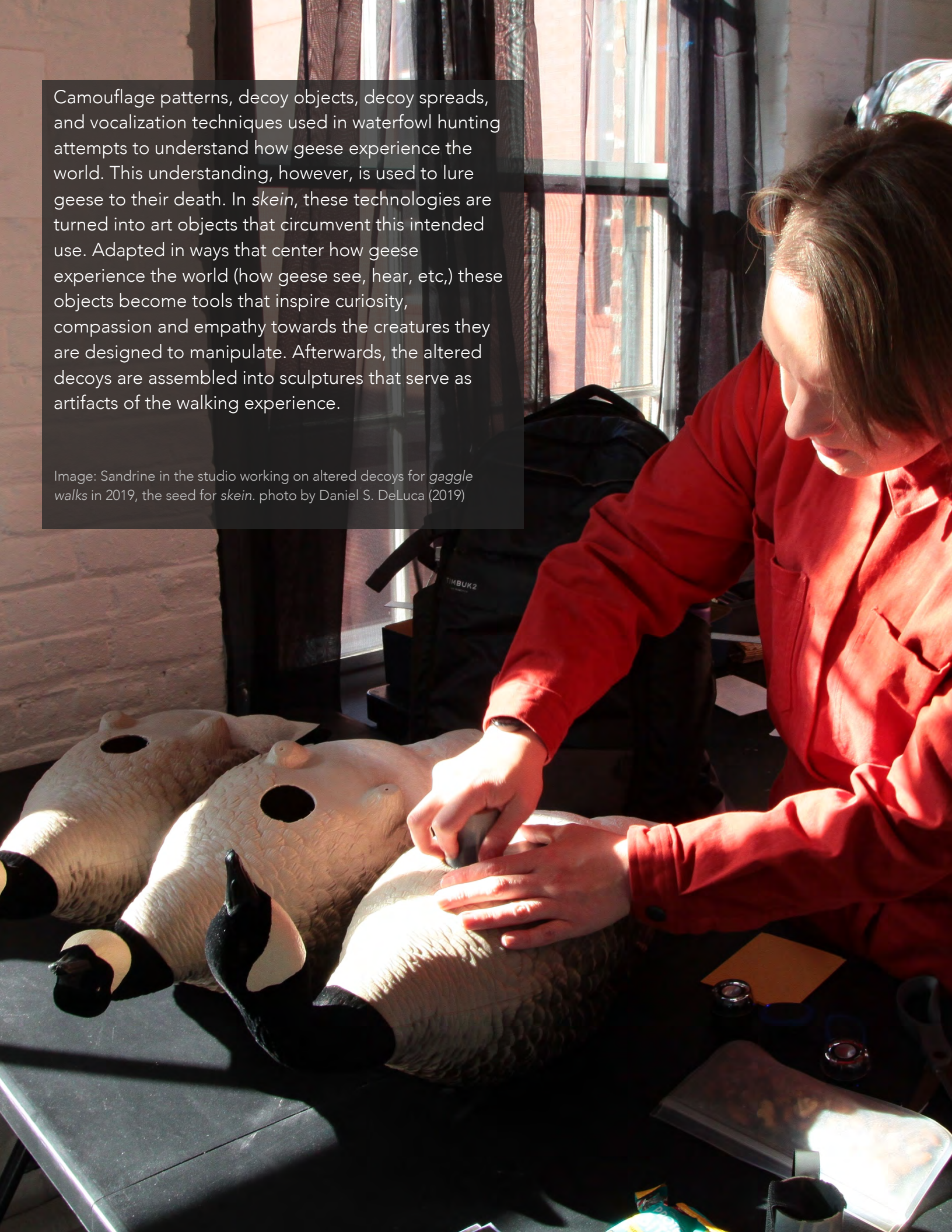
Each walk is sited in a different location along a known migration path annually taken by Canada geese during different seasons of a goose's life. Each walk is designed for groups of 6-12 participants (art audiences, park neighbors, nature enthusiasts, birders, those affiliated with local business and local civic and cultural institutions, etc.) During these walks, participants are led through observational exercises using altered hunting decoys.

Image: route for gaggle walk no. 1 (2019)



Camouflage patterns, decoy objects, decoy spreads, and vocalization techniques used in waterfowl hunting attempts to understand how geese experience the world. This understanding, however, is used to lure geese to their death. In *skein*, these technologies are turned into art objects that circumvent this intended use. Adapted in ways that center how geese experience the world (how geese see, hear, etc,) these objects become tools that inspire curiosity, compassion and empathy towards the creatures they are designed to manipulate. Afterwards, the altered decoys are assembled into sculptures that serve as artifacts of the walking experience.

Image: Sandrine in the studio working on altered decoys for *gaggle walks* in 2019, the seed for *skein*. photo by Daniel S. DeLuca (2019)





Images: participants in *gaggle walks no. 1 and no. 2* (2019) observe wild geese in urban wilds throughout Boston, MA. Some decoys we carry have sound pieces of human laughter installed inside. Others have holes drilled into their backs and are used as viewfinders to observe the surrounding environment.



AMERICAN
COLLEGE



Cackling Lovers (2019-20) mixed media sculpture/artifact (goose decoy, velvet gloves, steel, decoy cord, artificial flowers, ribbon, sound of human laughter) 72" x 49" x 15"



Holda's Gander (2019-20) sculpture/artifact (goose decoy, broomcorn, steel, decoy cord, sound of fetal heartbeat) 50" x 40" x 15"

Sandrine Schaefer

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skein Timeline

Summer 2024-Summer 2025 - Research and Development

May 2024 – July 2025

- ✦ Visit natural history collections and study with ornithologists (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology, etc.)
- ✦ Solidify route and locations for walks
- ✦ Identify location partners
- ✦ Develop content for walks
- ✦ fabricate objects to be used in walks (altered decoys)
- ✦ Assemble human gaggle (support team for the project)

August – September 2025

- ✦ Solidify and distribute promotional materials

Fall 2025 | Autumn Migration

In autumn, migratory Canada geese begin traveling to warmer regions. They gather in large flocks and fly southward, seeking milder climates and more abundant food sources.

October 2025

- ✦ Walk 1: Launch of *skein* project in **Massachusetts**. The first walk takes place in a public park where a large population of geese gather. Participants engage in conversation and experiential exercises, exploring the presence of geese in the space. This walk focuses on the departure of Canada Geese as they begin their migration south. Participants creatively explore the migration process and bid farewell to the geese.
- ✦ Walk 2: This walk occurs in **Maryland** or **Virginia**, exploring the Chesapeake Bay region. Participants learn about the importance of this stopover site for migrating waterfowl and how the bay's environment influence stopover behaviors.

Winter 2025-26 | Wintering

During winter, geese settle in areas with stable food and open water. Some geese migrate to southern regions while others remain in their breeding grounds throughout the winter. The latter population includes descendants of captive geese used as live decoys by hunters throughout the United States in the early 20th century. When the use of live decoys was banned in 1935, many hunters released captive geese back into the environment. Human infiltration through captivity left these geese and their descendants without patterns of migration, resulting in yearlong nesting in sites throughout North America.

November 2025

- ✦ Walk 3: This walk takes place in a coastal area of **North Carolina**. Participants observe ways migratory geese acclimate into a new environment with resident populations.

December 2025

- ✦ Walk 4: This walk takes place in a shopping center parking lot and/or suburban neighborhood in **South Carolina**. Participants observe wintering and foraging behaviors in these "human" designated spaces.

January - February 2026

- ✦ Process and reflect on project so far, making any necessary adjustments.
- ✦ Edit documentation from walks
- ✦ Report out (on website, social media, etc.)
- ✦ Promote future walks in series
- ✦ Organize artist talks supporting the project

Spring 2026 | Spring Migration + Breeding

As winter comes to an end, migratory geese travel back to their breeding grounds. They return to the areas where they nested the previous year, often reuniting with the same mate. The cycle begins again with pair bonding, nest building, and egg-laying.

May 2026

- ✦ Walk 5: This walk takes place in **Rhode Island** or **Connecticut**. Walk activities focus on returning and coupling behaviors and welcome new goslings.

Summer 2026 | Molting + Foraging

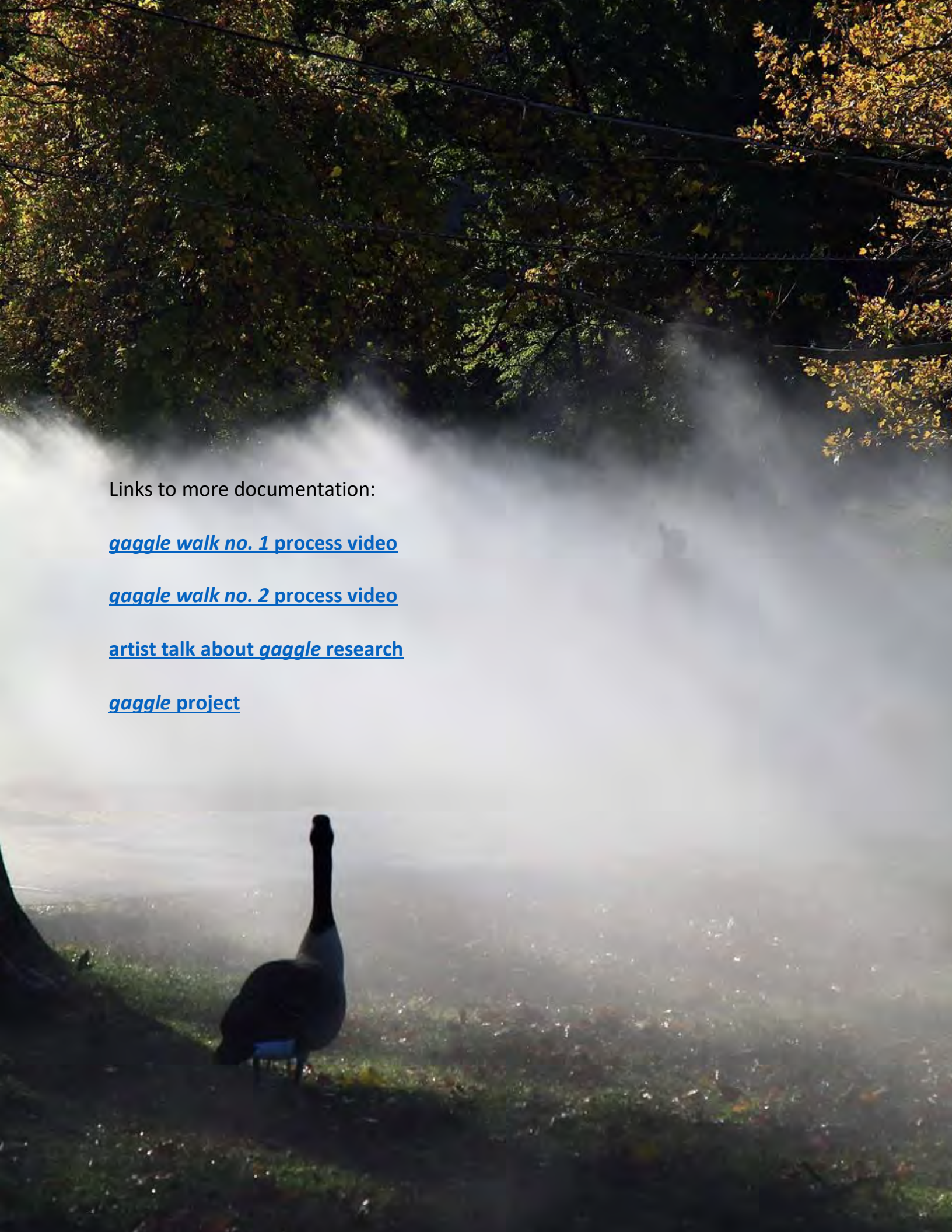
During the summer months, geese begin their annual molt. Over 6-8 weeks, geese gather in larger groups and temporarily lose their ability to fly as they shed and regrow their feathers.

June - July 2026

- ✦ Walk 6: The final walk in the *skein* project returns to the location of the first walk in **Massachusetts** and centers the molting experience and the growth of new flight feathers that prepare the geese to repeat their migration in the fall.

August 2026

- ✦ Collect and assess follow up surveys to those who participated in *skein*
- ✦ Process and reflect on project
- ✦ Edit and publish documentation from walks on website
- ✦ Deliver artist talk/s about the project
- ✦ Propose art exhibition of altered decoys and project documentation to art centers and visitor centers along migration path

A photograph of a misty landscape. In the foreground, a black and white goose stands on a grassy slope, looking towards the right. The background is a dense forest of trees with green and yellow leaves, partially obscured by a thick layer of white mist or fog. The lighting is soft, suggesting an early morning or late afternoon setting.

Links to more documentation:

[*gaggle walk no. 1 process video*](#)

[*gaggle walk no. 2 process video*](#)

[artist talk about *gaggle* research](#)

[*gaggle project*](#)