

Fox and Geese

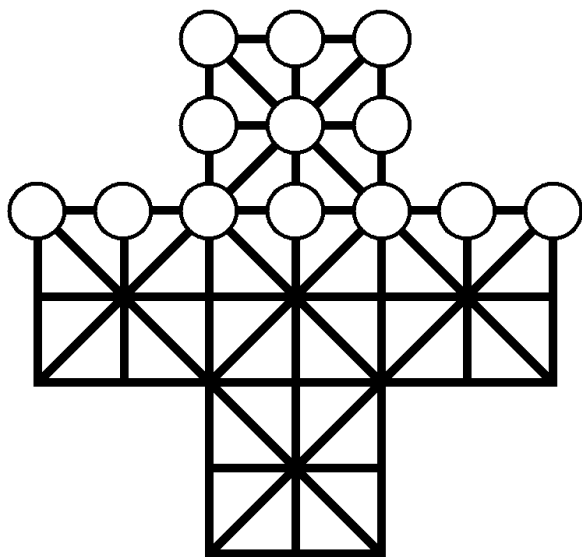


About the Game

Fox and geese is typical of a group of ‘hunt’ board games for two players, which were played throughout Europe and Asia. One player has very few pieces; but they have the power to capture or ‘kill’ the opponent’s pieces, which are greater in number but more restricted in movement.

The earliest reference to the game in European literature appears in the Icelandic *Grettis Saga* of about 1300, but gameboards dating from the same period have been found in England and Italy. An entry in the household accounts of Edward IV, king of England from 1461 to 1483, lists ‘two foxis and 26 hounds of silver overgilt,’ i.e.; two complete game sets. A later royal enthusiast of the game was the young Queen Victoria, who enjoyed playing fox and geese with Prince Albert during their courtship.

Originally the game consisted of 13 geese and one fox; the fox could ‘kill’ the geese, but both had the power to move in any direction. After 1600, the game began to change — the geese were no longer allowed to move diagonally or backward, but their number was increased.



How to Play

Arrange the thirteen “geese” on the board as shown in the diagram below. Players draw lots for control of the geese or the fox. The fox player places the fox on any empty space and takes the first turn in the game. (The space at the center of the board is usually the strongest place to start the fox.)

The fox is able to move in any direction — forward, backward, diagonally, or to the side. He moves one space at a time, unless capturing geese. The fox attempts to ‘kill’ the geese by jumping over each victim into a vacant hole. Multiple jumps are allowed, but the fox is not obliged to jump at every opportunity. A goose, once killed, is removed from the board.

A goose may move one space at a time forward, backward or to the side, not diagonally. A goose may not jump the fox.

The geese win if they corner the fox so that he cannot move. The fox wins the game if he reduces the “gaggle” of geese to five pieces or fewer.

Variations:

Originally, the geese could move one space at a time in any direction, including diagonally. This made the geese strong enough to win every game if played by an experienced player. The geese were later restricted to moving forward, backward or to the side, not diagonally. Later still, the geese were no longer allowed to move backward. This made the geese too weak, and extra geese (usually four) were added to the board to compensate. Lastly, a second fox was added. The game seems to play best, however, in the version described above, with 13 geese able to move backward, but not diagonally.