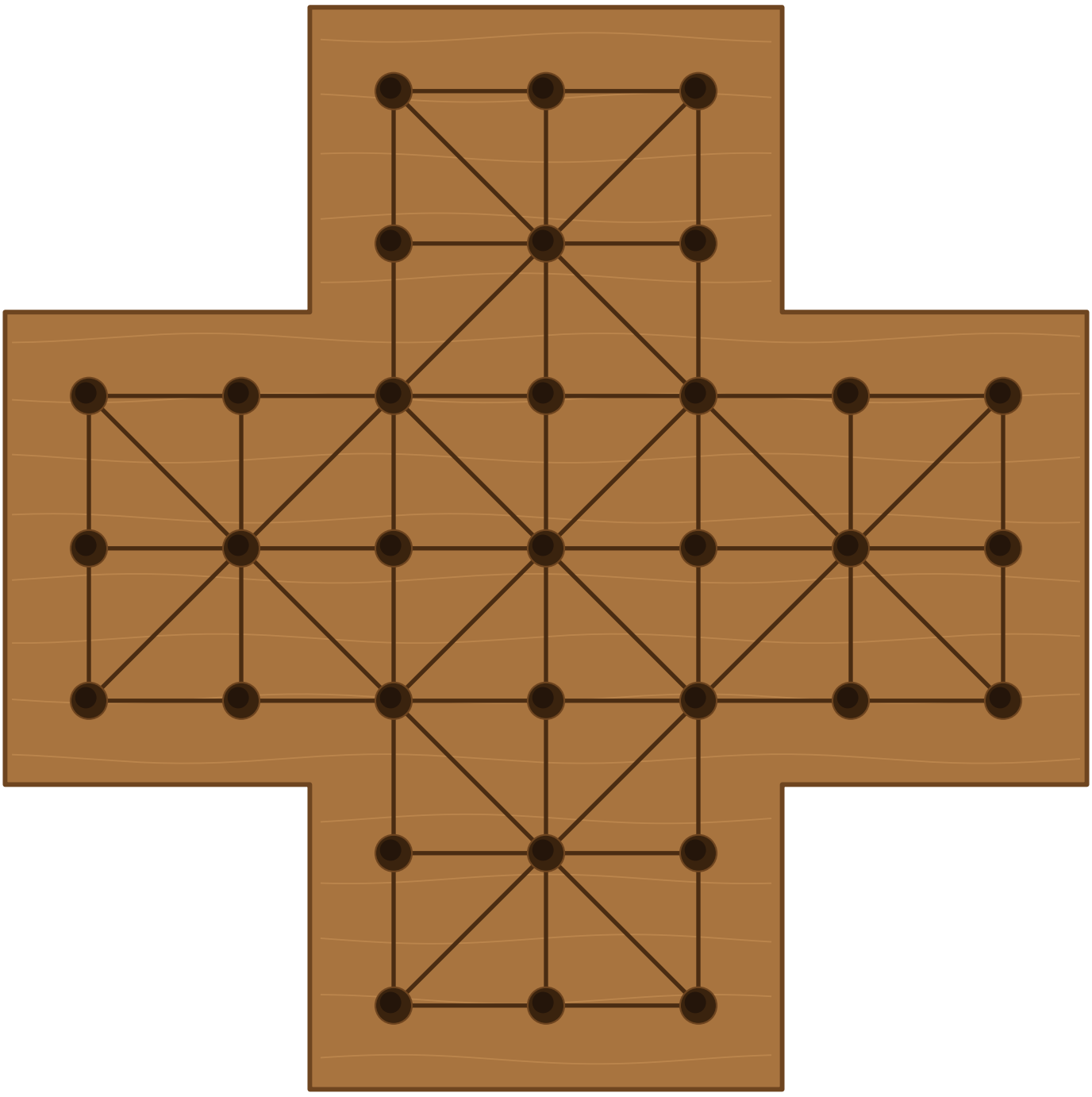
Fox and Geese

Game board · Medieval Europe · 2 players



Pieces sit on the holes and move along the lines, including the diagonal lines.

The rules are on the "How to Play" page.

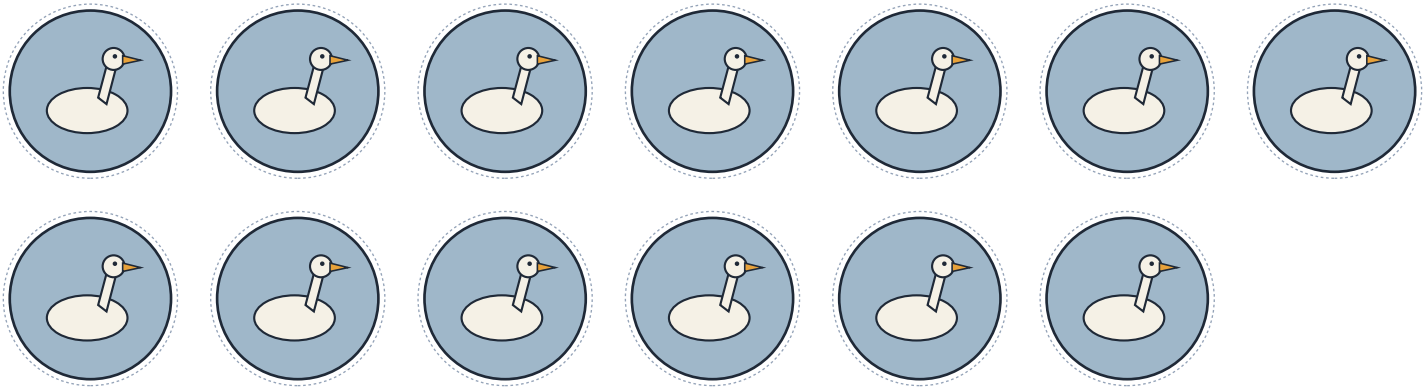
Fox and Geese: Pieces

Cut out the fox and the geese. 13 geese for the classic game, 4 more for the harder-for-the-fox game.

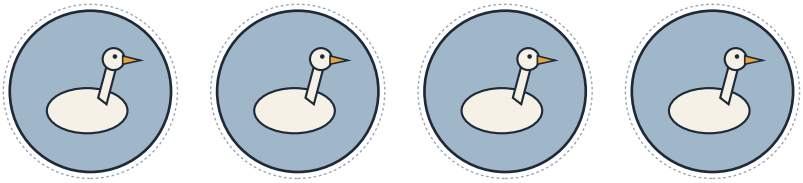
The fox



Geese (13)



Extra geese for the harder game (4)



Spare fox, in case one gets lost

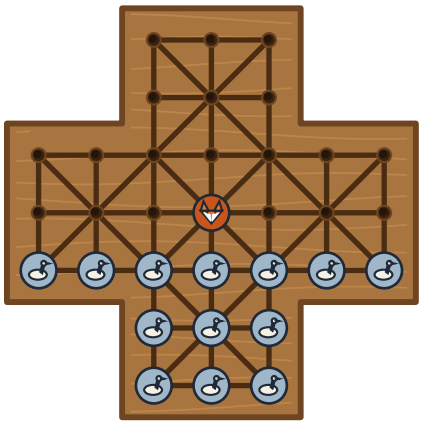


No time to cut? Use one coin for the fox and 13 beans or buttons for the geese.

Fox and Geese: How to Play

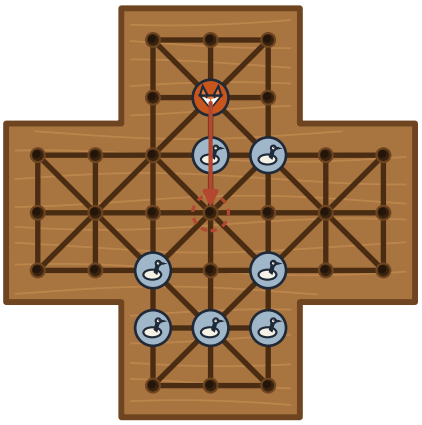
2 players · about 15 minutes · ages 6 and up

Start



13 geese and the fox

The fox jumps a goose



The goose it jumps over is taken off.

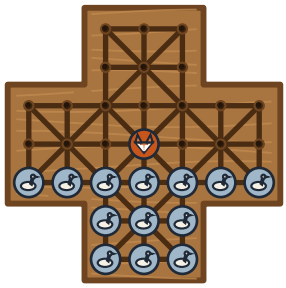
1. **Set up**
   One player is the fox, the other plays all the geese (the pieces sheet, or 1 coin and 13 buttons). Put the 13 geese on the bottom arm and the full row above it, and the fox on the center point (see the picture). Geese move first.
2. **Move**
   On your turn, move one piece one step along a line to the point right next to it, if it is empty. Fox and geese may move in any direction, forward, sideways, backward, and along the diagonal lines.
3. **Fox jumps**
   The fox captures a goose by jumping over it in a straight line to the empty point just beyond, like in checkers. Take that goose off the board. The fox may keep jumping in the same turn if it can. Jumping is allowed but never required.
4. **Geese never jump**
   Geese cannot capture. They win by crowding the fox so it has nowhere to go.
5. **Geese win**
   If the fox cannot move or jump on its turn, the geese win.
6. **Fox wins**
   If only 8 geese are left (the fox caught 5 of 13, or 9 of 17), the fox wins.
7. **Draw**
   If 20 moves each pass with no goose caught and the fox not trapped, it is a draw. Swap sides and play again.

About these rules: Fox games were played all over Europe with many different rules. This is the English game: 1 fox and 13 geese that can move in any direction. For a harder fox, add 4 geese on the 2 left and 2 right end points of the fox's row, so there are 17.

Fox and Geese

Name _____

Read about a hunting game played across Europe for hundreds of years.



The board at the start of a game.

Fox and Geese is a hunting game for two players. One player has a single fox. The other has a flock of 13 geese. The fox tries to catch geese by jumping over them. The geese try to crowd the fox into a spot where it cannot move. It is a battle between one strong piece and many weak ones.

Games like this were played across Europe for hundreds of years under many names. In France it was "the fox and the hens," in Germany "fox and geese," and in Iceland "fox chess." They probably grew out of tafl, an older family of Viking board games in which one side also had more pieces than the other.

A fox game called halatafl, which means "tail board," is mentioned in Grettis saga, an Icelandic story from the 1300s. The tail was probably the fox's tail. In England, King Edward IV, who ruled in the 1400s, bought two foxes and 26 hounds to make two sets of what was probably a fox game.

In Sweden the fox game is still played on a wooden board with holes and pegs, like the one on the game board page. Fox and Geese stayed popular for centuries. In the 1800s it was a favorite pastime of Queen Victoria of England.

Questions

1. How many foxes and how many geese are in the game?

2. How do the geese win?

3. What does the name halatafl mean, and what was the "tail" probably?

4. Which English king bought pieces for a fox game, and what pieces did he buy?