Walking With Waterfowl

A pocket guide to the Sackville Waterfowl Park

Celebrating 20 Years!
The Sackville Waterfowl Park was established in 1988 as a joint venture of the Town of Sackville and Ducks Unlimited Canada. The cooperation of Mount Allison University, the Province of New Brunswick, the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment Canada, and many corporate and individual supporters in the realization of this project is gratefully acknowledged.

Welcome

As you explore the 4 km (2.5 miles) of trails and boardwalks that wind through these 22 hectares (55 acres) of water, woods, marsh, and meadows, you will discover a world most people never know—the richly varied natural community of our native wetlands. More than 180 species of birds and close to 200 species of plants have been recorded in the Park.

This brochure is designed to lead you on a self-guided tour of the park. Interpretive signage at many locations will help you discover its wonders. In addition, at certain times, guided tours of the park are available through the Sackville Visitor Information Centre.

A Brief History

Originally, the park site was part of a vast saltmarsh, flooded daily by the Fundy tides. To the native Micmac people, the marshes were a valuable resource. Waterfowl were abundant. Cattail roots were a nutritious source of food and grasses were used for basket-weaving.

Acadian settlers came to the area in the late 1600s. They began ditching and draining the marshes to claim the rich soil for farming, an activity that continues to the present day.

Today, wetlands are valued as water reservoirs, natural purification systems, and important wildlife habitats. In recent years, thousands of acres of wetland around the upper Bay of Fundy have been secured by building structures to control water levels in large freshwater marsh impoundments.

Park Etiquette

For humans, the Sackville Waterfowl Park is an interesting place to visit. For the many kinds of wildlife that live here, it is home. Please respect their needs by observing the following courtesies:

1. Visit only during the daylight hours. Night visits may disturb resting waterfowl.
2. Please do not feed the ducks. Their natural diet is healthy and abundant.
3. Leave no litter. Garbage receptacles are provided for trash.
4. Keep pets under control (on leash) at all times in the park.
5. Stay on the trails and boardwalks to protect nests and wildflowers.
6. The trails are for pedestrians only. For safety’s sake, cycling is prohibited.
The boardwalk skirts the north side of the park until it comes to the Tantramar section of the Trans-Canada Trail, built on the roadbed of an old railway line to Prince Edward Island. At this point, turn right and follow the raised walkway for about 1 km.

3 Open Water
On your right, the deepest water in the park—more than 2 meters in some places—is the preferred habitat for diving waterfowl such as the Ring-necked Duck. It is also a favourite hunting ground for the Pied-billed Grebe, a pint-sized, grey-brown bird with a fat, black-and-white striped bill. This voracious predator dives in pursuit of small fish, such as golden shiners and sticklebacks. From mid-summer on, watch for fuzzy, zebra-striped young grebes, begging noisily to be fed, or hitching a ride on their parents’ backs.

In the air, you will almost certainly see the park’s “mosquito patrol”—squadrons of Tree Swallows, Bank Swallows and often a few Barn Swallows.

If you are visiting in June or July, watch for Bobolink in the wet meadow to the left of the trail, and Savannah Sparrow lurking in the trailside grasses. Further along, varied backyard plantings adjoining the park provide excellent shelter for a wide variety of birds, including American Robin, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee and Song Sparrow.

Among the cattail stands that rim the open water you may catch sight of a muskrat. This fur-bearing rodent not only feeds on cattails; it also uses the stalks of the plants to build its winter lodge, a mound of mud and vegetation rising above the surface of the water. Another marsh resident to watch for among the cattails is the American Bittern, a long-billed, beige and brown striped bird, almost the size of a turkey. Its cry, a deep,
hollow, booming, is one of the strangest sounds of the marsh at dusk.

4 An Urban Interlude
Nearing the southern end of the Trans-Canada trail you have a choice of routes. A turn to the right, behind a large metal storage building, takes you on a return loop through the park. Straight ahead lie the art galleries, gift shops and restaurants of downtown Sackville. It’s a perfect time to pause, enjoy a snack or a cool drink, and shop for film, books, sunscreen, snacks, or souvenirs.

When you are ready to return to the park you may either retrace your steps to rejoin the trail or proceed along Main Street, with the Town Hall on your left and Cranwood, the official residence of the President of Mount Allison University, on your right. Just before St. Paul’s Anglican Church, a stone cairn marks an entrance to the park. Turn right here to resume your tour at point (5).

Alternatively, if you prefer to see a bit more of the university campus, continue along Main Street to Rectory Lane, passing the Swan Pond and the Marjorie Young Bell Conservatory of Music on the left. At Rectory Lane, turn right and proceed to the end of the street. Just beyond the parking lot, you will rejoin the park trail system at point (7).

5 Among the Cattails
The densest stands of cattail in the park grow in the area adjacent to the zig-zag boardwalk that leads from the Anglican Church to the centre of the park. Two species of cattails—Narrow-leaved and Broad-leaved—grow here, along with a hybrid that combines characteristics of both.

The cattails provide shelter for nesting Red-winged Blackbirds. The male males with their scarlet and gold shoulder patches proclaim their presence with a loud “rusty hinge” call while the brown-striped females tend their nests, feeding the young on marsh insects. Another bird to look for here is the Sora, a common but seldom-seen member of the Rail family. You may not always see this small, yellow-billed marsh-dweller but in June and July you will almost certainly hear its eerie, descending whinny.

At the end of this section of boardwalk, turn right on the raised gravel path that cuts across the park. This is the bed of an old railway spur line that served a prosperous foundry and a busy stone quarry in the days when Sackville was a centre of heavy industry.

6 At the Bridge
A short distance on the gravel footpath brings you to a miniature covered bridge spanning a channel that links the inner and outer sections of the impoundment. Stop here for a moment to scan the waters on either side. These are favourite areas for dabbling ducks such as Mallard, Black, Northern Shoveler, Green-Winged and Blue Wing Teal, Gadwall, and American Wigeon.

This is also a good place to observe flocks of migrating shorebirds, from the tiny Semipalmated Sandpiper to the long-legged, long-billed Yellowlegs. Many shorebird species nest in the Arctic, but stop here from mid-July to late August to feed on the rich marshes and mudflats before continuing their long trek to wintering grounds in Central and South America.

After inspecting the covered bridge, go back a few paces and proceed along the curving boardwalk on your right, turning right again when you come to point (9).

7 The Transition Zone
If you have chosen to re-enter the park by way of Rectory Lane, you will find yourself on a gravel path that follows an old railway right-of-way, through a zone of shrubbery and trees. Straight ahead stand two convenient pit toilets. To your left, on either side of the trail, stand the United Church Home for Senior Citizens and Jennings Hall,
indicate the presence of masses of bacteria that extract and excrete traces of iron and oils from the decomposing debris on the bottom.

At the end of this section, you have a choice of routes. To the left, the main trail leads towards an observation tower and mixed woodlands. To the right, a boardwalk crosses the main impoundment and loops back to the central, gravel path near the covered bridge at the centre of the park. (Please see Note 6 for a description of this section).

### Into the Woods

The boardwalk here skirts the water’s edge for about 100 metres before coming to a gravel path in a lightly wooded area. At this point, a turn to the right leads to a wooden observation tower. After enjoying a panoramic view from this vantage point, turn and follow the trail deeper into the woods.

A short walk will bring you to an intersection. Straight ahead lies an alder swale and an exit from the park, just off Main Street. The right-hand trail will take you to a raised “island” in the marsh, crowned by large birch and spruce trees.

Watch for woodland birds such as American Redstart, Veery and Blue Jay. Fox and mink have occasionally been observed here as well.

### Between Meadow and Marsh

A short distance along the old rail line, a left turn through a thicket of alders leads to a boardwalk tracing the margin between a former upland meadow and shallow water. Shrubs, such as rhodora, a native species of azalea, grow on the upland. With the passing years much of the meadow has changed to woodland as willow, birch and poplar saplings become established. Yellow Warbler and Common Yellowthroat are at home in this moist habitat. In some years, the damp meadow provides a good nesting habitat for Common Snipe.

Virginia Rails have been observed in the shoreline tangle of reeds and grasses and broods of ducklings regularly feed in the shallow water. At certain times of the year, a rust-colored deposit appears in these shallows, and an oily film may be seen on the surface. These are not signs of pollution but indicate the presence of masses of bacteria that extract and excrete traces of iron and oils from the decomposing debris on the bottom.

### And Finally

A branch of this trail leads to the Atlantic Regional Office of the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS). However, the main trail turns sharply to the right, through a dense stand of shrubs and small trees, such as rhodora, wild spirea, and mountain ash, before returning to the main park entrance at the Sackville Visitor Centre. There, a wetlands interpretive display and knowledgeable guides are waiting (during the summer months) to answer your questions.
Checklist of Birds of the SACKVILLE WATERFOWL PARK

About 180 species of birds have been reported within the 22 hectares [55 acres] of the park and along its perimeter. Of these, 35 have been confirmed to date as breeding in the park. The following list observes the order and nomenclature of the American Ornithologists’ Union (A.O.U.) Checklist of North American Birds, 7th edition, 1998.

Many migratory species appear only for a short time or in certain seasons. A letter code indicates when they are most likely to appear:

* = Spring    F = Fall    S = Summer    W = Winter

Species for which breeding has been confirmed appear in bold type.

* Indicates uncommon species in the park.

** Indicates species that have been recorded only once or twice.

*** Indicates species that have been reported, but without confirmation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Loon**</th>
<th>Common Goldeneye*</th>
<th>Green-winged Teal</th>
<th>Red-necked Grebe**</th>
<th>Redhead***</th>
<th>Ring-necked Duck</th>
<th>Great Scoter**</th>
<th>Black Scoter**</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pied-billed Grebe</td>
<td>Great Eared Grebe</td>
<td>Greater Scaup*</td>
<td>Lesser Scaup*</td>
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<td>Double-crested Cormorant*</td>
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<td>American Bittern</td>
<td>Black-crowned Night Heron**</td>
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<td>Great Cormorant**</td>
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<td>Northern Pintail*</td>
<td>Broad-winged Hawk**</td>
<td>Sharp-shinned Hawk*</td>
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<td>American Bittern</td>
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<td>Broad-winged Hawk**</td>
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<td>Common Kestrel**</td>
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Downy Woodpecker SP, S, F, W
Hairy Woodpecker SP, S, F, W
Northern Flicker SP, S, F
Eastern Wood-Pewee* S
Willow Flycatcher**
Alder Flycatcher SP, S, F
Least Flycatcher** SP
Eastern Kingbird SP, S
Northern Shrike* SP, W
Blue-headed Vireo* SP, F
Warbling Vireo**
Red-eyed Vireo SP, S, F
Blue Jay SP, S, F, W
American Crow SP, S, F, W
Common Raven SP, S, F, W
Purple Martin** SP, S
Tree Swallow SP, S, F
Bank Swallow SP, S, F
Cliff Swallow* SP, S
Barn Swallow SP, S, F
Black-capped Chickadee SP, S, F, W
Red-breasted Nuthatch* SP, S, F, W
White-breasted Nuthatch** SP
Brown Creeper** W, SP
Marsh Wren** SP, F
Golden-crowned Kinglet SP, S, F, W
Ruby-crowned Kinglet SP, F
Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher**
Veery* SP, S
Swainson's Thrush* SP, S
Hermit Thrush* SP, F
American Robin SP, S, F, W
Gray Catbird SP, S, F
Northern Mockingbird** W
European Starling SP, S, F, W
American Pipit** F
Bohemian Waxwing* S, F, W
Cedar Waxwing SP, S, F, W
Tennessee Warbler* SP, F
Nashville Warbler* SP, F
Northern Parula SP, S, F
Yellow Warbler SP, S, F
Chestnut-sided Warbler SP, F
Magnolia Warbler SP, F
Cape May Warbler* SP, F
Black-throated Green Warbler*
Western Sandpiper** F
Least Sandpiper SP, S, F
White-rumped Sandpiper* S, F
Pectoral Sandpiper* S, F
Stilt Sandpiper**
Ruff**
Short-billed Dowitcher S, F
Long-billed Dowitcher* S, F
Common Snipe SP, S, F
American Woodcock* SP, F
Wilson’s Phalarope** SP, F
Laughing Gull***
Black-headed Gull**
Bonaparte’s Gull**
Ring-billed Gull SP, S, F, W
Herring Gull SP, S, F, W
Iceland Gull* SP, W
Great Black-backed Gull* SP, S, F, W
Caspian Tern** S, F
Common Tern** S, F
Black Tern* S
Rock Pigeon SP, S, F, W
Mourning Dove SP, S, F, W
Great Horned Owl** SP
Common Nighthawk** S, F
Chimney Swift* S
Ruby-throated Hummingbird SP, S, F
Belted Kingfisher SP, S, F
Red-bellied Woodpecker* W, F
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**
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<tr>
<td>Rose-breasted Grosbeak***</td>
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Duplicate copies or your daily trip checklists would be greatly appreciated. Please drop them off at the Welcome Centre on Mallard Drive or mail them. Contact us at:

**Town of Sackville**
Tourism Department
110 Main St., Box 6191
Sackville, NB E4L 1G6
www.sackville.com

Partners’ sites
Ducks Unlimited Canada
www.ducks.ca
Mount Allison University
www.mta.ca
Province of New Brunswick
www.gnb.ca
Canadian Wildlife Service
www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca

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