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they have raised their have raised their broods alone. As a result, during the fall migration, ducks have all new feathers, having left their old ones behind in the marshes.

Something to Think About

Wetlands are home to a wide variety of life forms. Each animal and plant species plays a vital role for other species and contains medicinal, food and other resources. No impairment of the functions of wetlands is acceptable. The Canadian Wildlife Service is emphasizing the preservation of biodiversity in wetlands by creating, for example, National Wildlife Areas such as the one at Lac Saint-François.

Station 11

Diversity in Uniformity

Marshes may seem uniform and identical, but that is deceiving. The marsh around you contains four different plant associations, made up of a mix of cattails (bulrushes) and lake sedge related to various plants. Marshes in the Area are made up of 15 groups of plants, the most common being Canada reed grass (blue joint), broad-leaved and narrow-leaved cattails, lake sedge, purple loosestrife and spotted jewelweed. More than 100 plant species are growing in the Area's marshes.

Station 12

Muskrat

The muskrat plays an essential role in maintaining marshes. It opens up the marshes by forming the expanses of open water free of vegetation that are needed

by wildlife. It forms a little pond around its lodge or burrow. In winter, muskrats feed mainly on cattail roots (bulrushes), sedge, water lilies and grasses. In summer, they eat the leaves, stems and succulent parts of the same plants. If their numbers grow too large, they could create holes in the dike and destroy habitats. Here, as elsewhere, it is a question of balance.

Station 13

Eastern White Cedar

Everyone calls it the "cedar," but real cedars do not grow in North America, except perhaps as ornamentals. They live a very long time due to their resistance to disease, acquired over the course of their development. The oldest trees in Quebec are Eastern White Cedars more than 1,000 years old found in Abitibi. They are also widely used in popular medicine, for example, as a cure for scurvy, which was once used by our ancestors.

Station 14

American Elder

Since the pith in its stems can be removed easily, this shrub was used to make pipes, peashooters and maple-sap spiles. Clusters of flowers appear in June and the fruit are ripe at the end of August. Birds love its fruit. An opportunistic shrub, it is able to quickly colonize the driest areas of the dike.

Station 15

Wood Duck

Because their were very few Wood Ducks left at the beginning of the century, hunting was prohibited until September 1950. Since then, their numbers have been increasing constantly, owing to the large number of beaver ponds in wooded areas and the installation of artificial nesting boxes. You can see here a polymer model installed by Ducks

Unlimited, which estimates that there are now more than 100,000 nesting boxes in North America. The Wood Duck has to compete for natural hollows and nesting boxes with other ducks, such as the Hooded Merganser, Common Goldeneye and other species, such as the European Starling, Eastern Screech Owl, American Kestrel, squirrels and even bees. In the eyes of many, the Wood Duck symbolizes the success of wetland restoration in North America.

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Printing
MRC Le Haut Saint-Laurent

Pictures taken from :
Reid, G. X. and H. S. Zim, 1967. Pond Life. A Guide to Common Plants and Animals of North American Ponds and Lakes. A Golden Nature Guide, Golden Press, NY.
CWS. 1990. Guide d'identification des oiseaux aquatiques (a reprinted and revised version of the US FWS's Ducks at a Distance [1978]).

Infography and realization: Léo-Guy de Repentigny, CWS, Qc

LAC SAINT-FRANÇOIS

Great Egret Trail

A discovery tour to give you a better understanding of how a diked pond helps to increase biodiversity in the Area's wetlands

Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area

Length: 3.7 km
Approximate time: 2 hours

2000

Plants and flowers picking is forbidden on the National Wildlife Area

Friends of the Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area

Station 1

A man-made habitat

Ducks Unlimited built this pond and maintained a minimum level of water in order to create an optimal habitat for wildlife after three to five years.

Throughout the year, 18 species of ducks, including the Redhead, Wood Duck and all other dabbling ducks, an be seen here. They obtain food by tilting their bodies forward and downward into the water; they can take off straight up without running across the surface of the water. The best times to spot them are from mid-April to the end of May and in August until the hunting season opens in September.

A pair of Wood Ducks take flight

Station 2

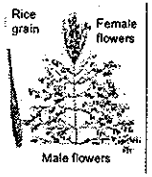
Broad-leaved Arrowleaf

The pond contains a number of aquatic plants, including the arrowleaf, which can be recognized from its arrow-shaped leaves. Its flowers consist of three white, almost transparent petals. Beavers and muskrats eat the entire plant, including the delicious tubers, which are also eaten by humans in the same way they eat potatoes.

Station 3

Wild rice

You can see a small natural stand of wild rice, an annual grass that can grow up to one metre high and reproduces via seeds. In July, you can see male flowers placed just below female flowers, which produce delicious black grains. Often introduced into habitats for aquatic wildlife, it is a favourite of ducks, blackbirds, Sora and buntings. There is a large number of clumps along the dike.



Station 4

Herons

Members of the family Ardeidae come to this marsh regularly. All species of breeding birds in this family can be seen in the pond. They can be distinguished as follows:

Great Blue Heron— The biggest member of the family, whose dominant colour is slate blue.

Great Egret(on cover of pamphlet) — A large, all-white heron with a yellow beak and all-black legs.

Black-crowned Night-Heron– Stocky, with a short neck and legs. Adults are mainly grey and black and the young are brownish in colour.

Green Heron— A small heron (the size of a crow) that is squat, with a dark green back and a brown-striped neck.

American Bittern— Of average size, it is squat and brown with black flight-feathers.

Least Bittern— The smallest member of the family, mainly black with buff-coloured spots on its wings.

Station 5

Winterberry

Yes, there is a species of holly in Quebec, and it can grow up to eight metres high! Although it looks like Christmas holly, it does not keep its leaves in winter. It can be found along waterways and swamps. In spring, it develops clusters of white flowers at the base of its leaves. After the leaves fall in autumn, a myriad of small bright red fruits appear on the female plants.

Station 6

Marsh or swamp

You can see both a swamp and a marsh. The difference between the two is simple : a swamp (on the left) is a wooded marsh : it contains trees or shrubs. The marsh (on the right) contains aquatic plants. These two types of wetlands have not always been appreciated, even though they are essential to biodiversity. They were often destroyed or converted to other uses.

Station 7

The most productive ecosystem on earth

If you could walk in this pond, you would see birds typical of marshes, such as Soras, the Marsh Wren and the Least Bittern, and a number of amphibians and reptiles. Among the mammals, you would definitely meet the Muskrat and its number one enemy, the mink. You would be surrounded by countless invertebrates (insects, molluscs, crustaceans, arachnids, etc), which are a major source of food for vertebrates. Did you know that 45% of vertebrate species in Québec live in riparian habitats, most of which are wetlands? Think about the ecological and economic importance of such habitats.

Snapping Turtle

Station 8

Speckled alder

Large teeth recut into smaller ones

The alder is the most common shrub in the Area. A pioneer species of wetlands, its roots keep nitrogen in the soil. Like the willow, its internal bark, contains salicin, a product similar to aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid).

Station 9

Staghorn sumac

The staghorn sumac grows in large clumps as reproduction takes place primarily underground. In the region, it grows to 4.5 metres in height and 10 cm in diameter. In fall, sumac stands are a splendid sight, with their bright red palm-shaped leaves. Resistant to cold, the sumac's red fruit is eaten by birds in winter.

Station 10

Duck feathers

Why are there so many feathers in the marsh? After the females lay their eggs, male ducks join together in a flock of up to 100 members and prepare to moult. Once their wing feathers fall out, moulting is complete. As a result, in July, they cannot fly for a two- to three-week period and hide from predators in the middle of the marsh. After moulting, the males plumage looks more like the females. Their breeding plumage reappears in September or October, depending on the species, after partial moulting takes place, which does not involve the wing feathers. Females moult in summer after