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Amherst Point

Migratory Bird Sanctuary

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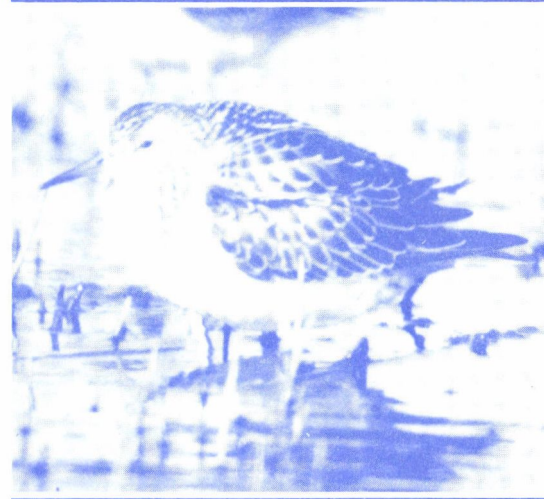
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Introduction

Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary is located five kilometres southwest of Amherst, Nova Scotia, at the head of the Bay of Fundy. The sanctuary, which presently encompasses an area of 490 hectares, was established in 1947 by the Government of Canada with the agreement of the landowners. This action came in response to requests by local residents who appreciated the importance of the area for wildlife and who wished to have it protected. To provide secure protection of habitats in the sanctuary, the Government of Canada acquired the lands in the early 1970s as part of a national habitat protection program administered by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) and designated them as a component of Chignecto National Wildlife Area.

History

The landscape of Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary is a mosaic of ponds, marshes, forests, and old farm fields. The effects of man's activities are apparent, but past geological events are responsible for the more unusual features. The most interesting are the many conical depressions called "sinkholes" that occur throughout the sanctuary. The Amherst Point area is underlain by gypsum, and at sites where deposits lie close to the surface, the gypsum has dissolved away, leaving those



unusual depressions. The ponds that have formed in many of the sinkholes are consequently rich in minerals.

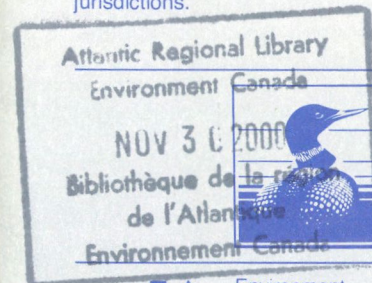
European settlers, who arrived in the region during the late seventeenth century, diked and drained the saltmarshes that had formed at the head of the Bay of Fundy after the last period of glaciation. For over 200 years the marshes within the present sanctuary provided man with fertile hay and pasture land, but most of that land has not been farmed since the 1940s. In the mid 1970s these abandoned agricultural marshlands were shallowly flooded with freshwater through the installation of dikes and water control structures, thus providing wildlife with valuable wetland habitat.

About the Canadian Wildlife Service

Man shares the world with birds, fish and other animals. Like them, he depends on the land, vegetation, water and air for survival. Any massive changes in the environment which affect wildlife must eventually affect man.

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) deals with wildlife matters that are the responsibility of the Canadian government.

The role of CWS is basically twofold: to protect and manage Canada's migratory birds and to cooperate with the provinces, territories and Parks Canada in carrying out wildlife research and management projects within their jurisdictions.



Watch for this loon on blue signs marking National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries



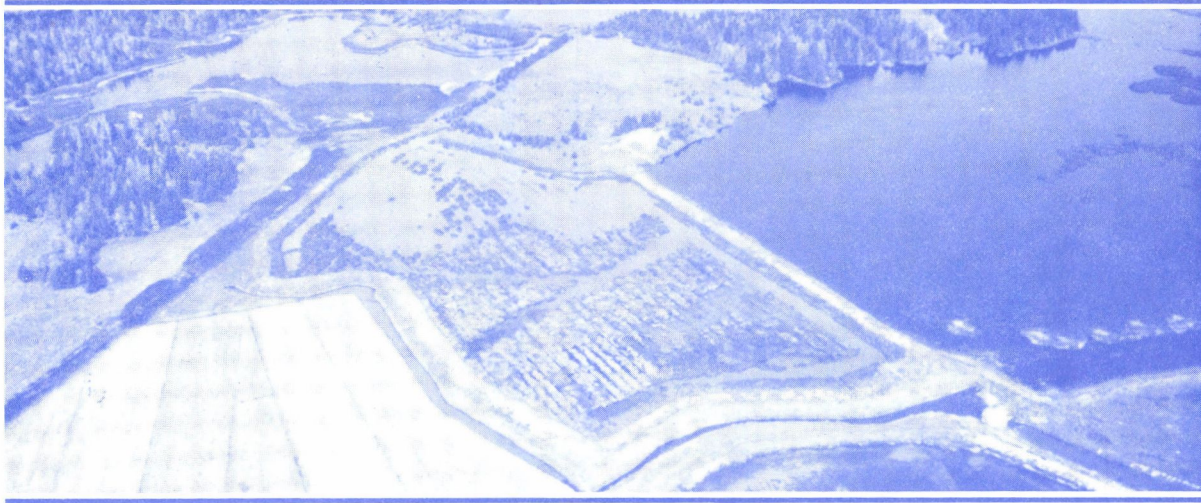
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Canadian Wildlife Service

Service canadien de la faune

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Early settlers also cleared the uplands for farms, planted orchards, and cut logs for timber. The last homestead within the present sanctuary burned in 1929, and the upland fields have not been farmed and timber has not been harvested for several years.

For many years local residents mined gypsum at Amherst Point for the home manufacture of wall plaster, and from 1905 to 1912 a commercial mine was operated near the sanctuary. A railway was used to haul the gypsum from the mine across the sanctuary to a dock on Cumberland Basin. Although the rails were removed some years ago, a portion of the rail bed is still used as a nature trail.

Wildlife

Most of the more than 200 species of birds that have been observed at Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary occur there regularly. The diversity and richness of its habitats and the strategic location of the sanctuary on a much-used migration route account for its unusual attractiveness and importance to birds. Waterfowl and other marshbirds are particularly abundant and include most species commonly found in the Atlantic provinces. Black Duck, Pintail, American Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern and Sora nest in the sanctuary.

Scaup, Common Goldeneye, scoters and mergansers are regular migrants. However, the sanctuary's wildlife values are most strikingly exemplified by the occurrence of various unusual waterfowl and marshbirds. Gadwall, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Virginia Rail, Common Gallinule, American Coot and Black Tern have all nested there regularly in the past few years. Stray European waterfowl and several southern waders have also appeared. Many of those have also occurred at other locations in the Atlantic provinces; however, the sanctuary hosts an unusually large number of species of limited occurrence and distribution in the region.

The sanctuary also provides habitat for an impressive variety of hawks, owls, shorebirds, and song birds. Because of its location, the sanctuary attracts large numbers of migrants and many early spring arrivals in the region first appear at Amherst Point. The diverse landscape also provides nesting habitat for many of those species as well as a few that remain all year. A check-list of the birds of Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary is available from the CWS, Sackville, New Brunswick, E0A 3C0.

The most noticeable mammals are muskrat, snowshoe hare, and red squirrel; but meadow voles, red-backed mice, and masked shrews are undoubtedly more numerous. Red fox, raccoon, mink, short-tailed weasel, striped skunk, and white-tailed deer also inhabit the sanctuary.

Vegetation

The wetlands of Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary are of several natural types ranging from sinkhole ponds to bogs; however, shallow freshwater marshes developed by man comprise much of the wetland area. Most are rich in minerals supplied either by the gypsum-limestone bedrock or marine silt deposits. Cattails and burreeds are the most plentiful emergent aquatic plants occurring around the margins of ponds and lakes and throughout the marshes. Water milfoil, pondweeds and other submergents grow primarily in the deeper waters.





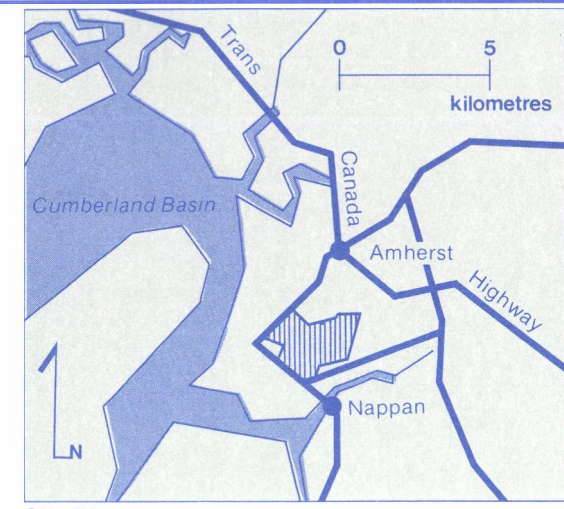
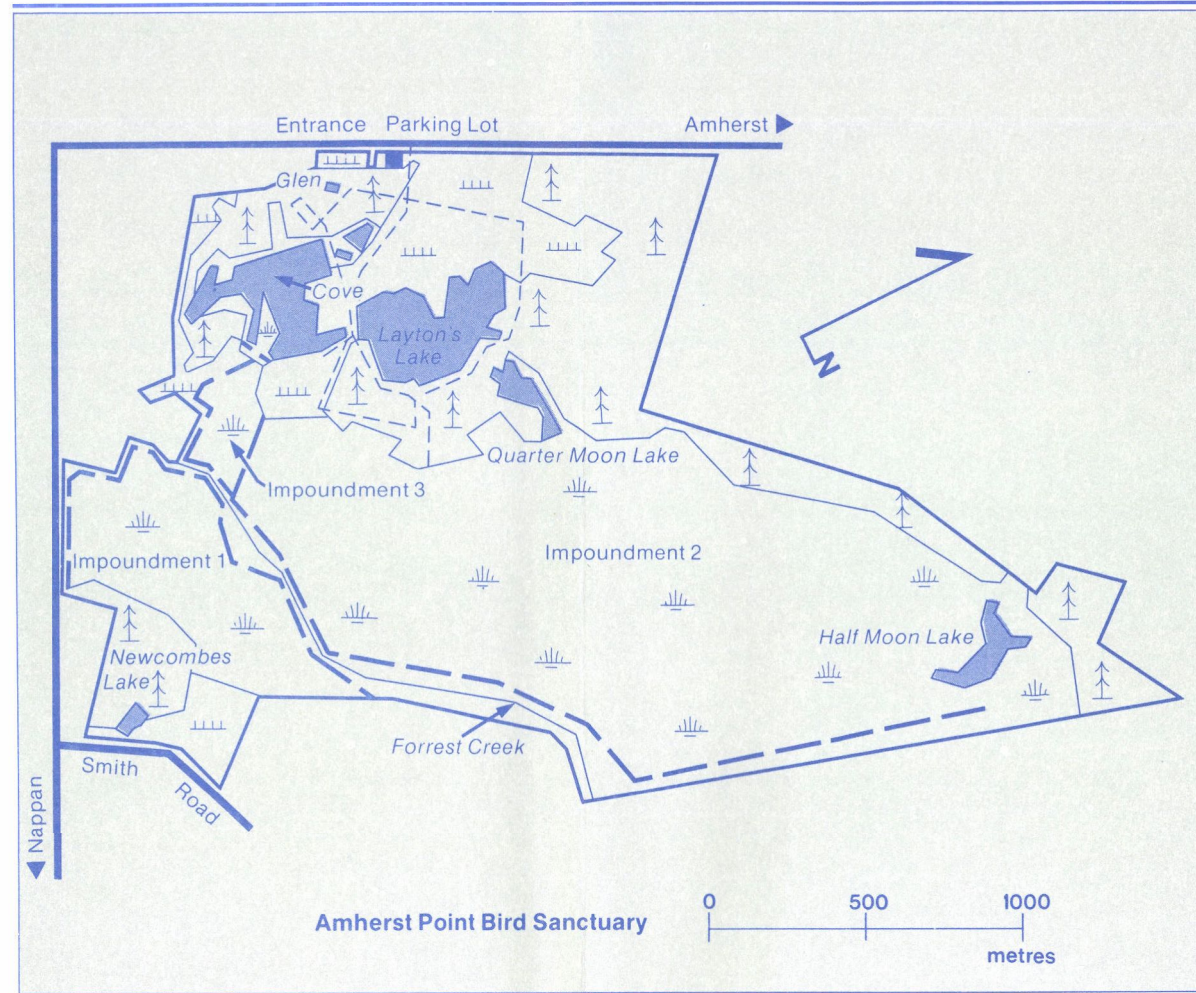
The wooded lands of the sanctuary are dominated by conifers, particularly spruce, balsam fir and larch. Eastern hemlock is prevalent on the slopes and ridges surrounding some of the sinkholes and white birch on sites recently cut over. A few sugar maple and yellow birch are all that remain of a formerly more prominent hardwood stand. Hawthorns and wild apple trees occur commonly along the woodland edges and tracks, and a few ornamentals including silver maple, Manitoba maple and scotch pine were added around the former farmsteads. An interesting assortment of uncommon ferns and other ground flora requiring a fertile substrate grow on and around gypsum outcroppings in the woodlands.

The old farm fields are in various stages of succession back to woodland. Some are vegetated by goldenrods and other pioneering species while wild rose, alder and young conifers are taking over where succession is more advanced.

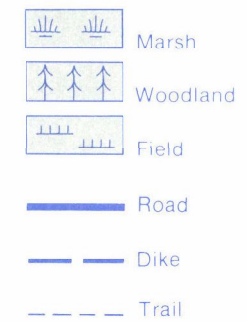
Management

The overall objective of management at Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary is to provide quality habitats for a large variety of wildlife. To meet that objective, all habitat components of the sanctuary are taken into consideration. Most attention, however, has been given to the area's wetlands, and since the land was acquired by the Government of Canada there has been considerable work to improve their value for wildlife. That work was conducted largely by Ducks Unlimited (Canada) in cooperation with the CWS. Dikes have impounded water to create shallow freshwater marshes that provide valuable habitat for many species of wildlife. Additional management procedures such as water draw-down and mechanical removal of dense vegetation are undertaken periodically to further enhance the quality of the wetlands. Periodic mowing of old farm fields and selective cutting of woodland stands are considered essential to the maintenance of the sanctuary's habitat diversity and importance to wildlife.

Surveys and research to monitor wildlife populations and to assess habitat conditions are vital to the planning and implementation of management activities and are undertaken regularly.



Site Plan



Recreational opportunities

For many years the Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary has provided people with an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. Many people visit the sanctuary to observe and photograph birds, but other visitors go there simply to walk in its pleasant surroundings. Some of the trails through the woods and around the ponds have been there for 50 years. Other trails were developed as recently as 1980 as part of the CWS wildlife interpretation program. In the winter the trails are used by snowshoers and cross country skiers and the ponds by skaters. The sanctuary also provides an ideal opportunity for nature education and many school classes, cub packs and other groups take advantage of it.



Regulations

Activities in Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary are controlled by regulations set forth in the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations and the National Wildlife Area Regulations. The sanctuary boundaries are posted with blue and white signs, illustrating a loon, which signify the protected status of the area. Notices at the access points to the sanctuary list those activities which are permitted and some that are prohibited.

The following activities are permitted:

- fishing and trapping subject to provincial and/or federal regulations.
- wildlife observation, canoeing, hiking, skiing, and berry-picking.

Other activities such as the following are prohibited. However, some may be authorized by a permit from the CWS.

- hunting
- operating snowmobiles and outboard motors
- allowing dogs or cats to run at large
- cutting, removing, or wilfully damaging any vegetation
- camping and having campfires
- dumping or depositing rubbish or waste material
- destroying or molesting any wildlife, nest, or eggs
- operating motor bikes and motor vehicles, except in the parking area

How to get there

To reach Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary, leave the trans-Canada highway at the Amherst exit next to the Wandlyn Motel and then turn left towards Amherst Point. The entrance to the sanctuary and a parking lot are located on the left-hand side of the highway approximately three kilometres from the trans-Canada exit.

For more information about Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary, please write

Habitat biologist
Amherst Point Migratory Bird Sanctuary
Canadian Wildlife Service
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Sackville, N.B.
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