Canadian Wildlife Service
Artic Ecology Map Series
Critical Wildlife areas

Descriptive report

Fort George River

FORT GEORGE RIVER
(Sheet #2180)

The Fort George map sheet includes a section of south-west Quebec which borders James Bay in the south and Hudson Bay to the north. Also included are numerous islands in James Bay and the Belcher group in Hudson Bay.

The Fort George River system, which includes as tributaries the Kanaapscow and Sakami Rivers, drains much of the interior of the map area and empties into James Bay. To the north the major drainage is into Hudson Bay by the Little and Great Whale Rivers. The Eastmain River system drains the southern portion of the map area into James Bay.

The area north of 55°N is characterized by a scattering of vegetation characteristic of both Tundra and Taiga vegetation zones. The central and southern regions are primarily under continuous forest cover. The entire map area is a network of lakes and rivers.

The east coast of James Bay is an extremely important staging and nesting area for waterfowl. Canada Geese, Blue Geese, Snow Geese, Brant, White-winged Scoters, Common Eider and others utilize the coastal areas for one or both of the habitat functions.

The islands of James Bay, which include Charlton Island and the Twin Islands also provide staging and nesting habitat for waterfowl.

The Twin Islands and small islands in the vicinity are of year round importance to local Polar Bears and Beluga Whales.

Anadromous Arctic Char are found in most suitable coastal streams but are most abundant north of the Fort George River. Brook Trout are common to abundant throughout the map sheet.

The following is the descriptive text for units mapped on this sheet.

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
1	This unit includes the southern most portion of the Nastapoka Islands and Nastapoka Sound. A description for both areas is included in Unit #5 of the Kogaluk River map sheet. The Nastapoka Islands are breeding areas for the Common Eider (Cooch, Gillespie). Beluga Whales are distributed in small numbers along the coast of the Nastapoka Islands during the summer but are most abundant in the Nastapoka River estuary and in Richmond Gulf. Nastapoka Sound is an important calving area for this group of Whales (Sergeant). Harbour Seals occur sparingly in association with the Nastapoka Islands and Ringed Seals are common along the entire coastline (Mansfield).
2	The southern part of Richmond Gulf is included in this map unit. A more complete discussion of Richmond Gulf is included for the Kogaluk River map sheet. The Gulf supports a small population of Harbour Seals (Mansfield) and provides summer range for good numbers of Beluga Whales (Sergeant). Arctic Char and Brook Trout are common in the streams entering the Gulf. Brook Trout, Lake Whitefish and Cisco are common in the brackish waters (Hunter). Richmond Gulf and vicinity provide breeding area for Falcons (Fyfe).
3	This map unit includes Upper Seal Lake and Lower Seal Lake which supports a fresh-water population of Harbour Seals. A more complete discussion on this subject is included under the Kogaluk River map sheet.
4	The Lac Bienville area represents the southern limit of the winter range for the western herd of Ungava Caribou. The area to the west of the lake is not suitable winter range due to the excessive hardness of the snow. It may, however, be utilized for calving or for summer range (Des Meules).

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
5	The Charlton Island unit is a staging area for up to 100,000 Brant (Cooch). Scoters numbering in the thousands have been reported associated with the Island (Heyland). Charlton Island is known to be a breeding area for Surf Scoters (Godfrey, 1966).
6	One hundred thousand White-winged Scoters were observed staging in this bay in one day (Heyland).
7	The coastal region of eastern James Bay is an extremely important migration route for Geese. Approximately 250,000 to 500,000 Canada Geese migrate through this area on route to their breeding grounds along the east coast of Hudson Bay and their winter range on the east coast of the United States (Heyland, Cooch, Kerbes). Of the 600,000 Geese that winter on the east coast of the United States approximately 99% breed in Ungava (Heyland).
8	Granite outcroppings are well back from the coast in this area thereby creating extensive lowland marshes which are heavily utilized for spring and fall staging by Blue and Snow Geese (Kerbes). The east James Bay coast is also used extensively for staging by Brant and White-winged Scoters (Heyland). In addition, thousands of Canada Geese and Pintails nest inland in this area and Common Eiders nest along the coast (Jonkel).
9	A large area east of James Bay has been made a Beaver reserve for the use of Indians in the area (Simard). Beaver, muskrat, otter, and mink are abundant along the coast and inland from James Bay (Jonkel, Macpherson).
10	This area harbors a population of approximately 8,000 Ringed and Bearded Seals. The Ringed Seals pup around islands and landfast ice, while the Bearded Seals pup on drifting ice (Jonkel).

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
11	This unit includes the Twin Islands, Spencer Island, Walter Island and Grey Goose Island which are situated in the Twin Islands Game Sanctuary. All of the islands provide summer sanctuary and winter denning habitat for Polar Bear. The population for the entire unit is in the hundreds (Jonkel). Ringed and Bearded Seals are common around the islands (Mansfield). Wintering Beluga Whales occur in leads in the ice in the vicinity of these islands (Jonkel). The South Twin Island supports a breeding population of King Eider (Godfrey, 1966). North Twin Island experiences an influx of Willow Ptarmigan during the species' fall migration southward. Approximately 3,000 - 4,000 Ptarmigan inhabited the island between November 20th and December 25th. The island supports a summer resident population of Peregrine Falcons and supported Gyrfalcons during the residence of the Willow Ptarmigan (Russell). Concentrations of thousands of Black Ducks and thousands of Canada Geese occur on the Twin Islands during migration (Heyland).
12	The coastline in this unit is characterized by granite outcrops which extend to the coast and by horseshoe bays fringed with marsh vegetation (Kerbes). The coastal marshes are extremely important as spring and fall staging areas for the large Canada Goose which breeds north along the Hudson Bay coast (particularly around Povungnituk) (Cooch, Heyland, Kerbes). Staging populations of between 250,000 and 500,000 have been estimated (Heyland, Kerbes).
13	This unit is used as a staging area for approximately 60,000 Brant in September (Heyland).
14	Anadramous Arctic Char are found in suitable coastal streams throughout the map sheet, however the most productive streams are found north of the Fort George River. Arctic Char exist south of the Fort George River, however, and specimens have been taken from

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
	the Eastmain River (Le Jeune). A good Arctic Char fishery occurs at the mouth of the Great Whale River (Hunter). Brook Trout are common to abundant in suitable streams throughout the map sheet (Le Jeune). Lake Sturgeon are found in small numbers in streams and rivers south of the Fort George. Most are non-anadromous populations although some do summer in brackish estuaries (Le Jeune). Anadromous Lake Whitefish and Cisco spend the summer in James Bay (Hunter).
15	This unit includes the Long Island and Long Island Sound areas. This unit is a major summer staging and molting area for Scoters (Cooch, Macpherson). Rafts of all species of Scoters utilize Long Island Sound as a molting area (Macpherson). The staging population of White-winged Scoters in this unit has been estimated at 50,000 birds (Cooch). The unit is also a major staging area for Brant whose staging populations have been estimated at 100,000 (Cooch). Hundreds of Canada Geese nest in the Area (Jonkel) and many Canada Geese from the Povungnituk region migrate through (Cooch). The tips of the large island and all small islands are summer sanctuaries for Polar Bears. The islands may also be of some importance as denning areas. The population total for the entire unit is probably in the tens to one hundred category (Jonkel). Beluga Whales have been observed in the vicinity of these islands (Sergeant). Arctic Fox are present on Long Island (Macpherson). The Fort George natives come up the coast for Arctic Char in Long Island Sound (Le Jeune).
16	Burton Lake provides Lake Trout for Fort George natives (Le Jeune).

UNIT NUMBER	DESCRIPTION
17	Willow Ptarmigan migrate in spring and fall along the coastal areas to reach summer range to the north and winter range south of this map sheet. Numbers of birds migrating through this area have been estimated in the thousands (Jonkel) and tens of thousands in peak years (Fyfe). An influx of Willow Ptarmigan onto North Twin Island occurs in late September and individuals have left by late December (Russell).
18	A breeding colony of Herring Gulls occurs in this unit (Macpherson, 1961).
19	The tips of the large islands and all the small islands are summer sanctuaries for Polar Bears, and may be of some denning importance. The population for the unit ranges in the tens to one hundred (Jonkel).
20	Skerries to the southwest of the mouth of Robertson Bay are used as hauling out areas by Harbour Seals (Freeman).
21	A breeding colony of Herring and Glaucous Gulls occurs within this unit (Macpherson,1961).
22	Kasegalik Lake is the location of a resident Harbour Seal population. The Seals also frequent the Kasegalik River (Freeman). In the Kasegalik River valley, several Peregrine Falcon breeding sites were seen in 1959 and 1960. A large number of waterfowl including Canada Geese, Hudson Bay Eider, King Eider, American Eider, American Merganser, Common Loon, Arctic Loon, Red-throated Loon, and others feed and breed in the vicinity of Kasegalik Lake (Freeman, 1970).
23	A more complete discussion of the Belcher Islands is included under the Kogaluk River map sheet.

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