

## General and Wildlife Viewing Information

# Serpentine Wildlife Area

### Surrey

The Serpentine Wildlife Area (SWA) contains 106 hectares of habitat important to wildlife. The area north of 44th Avenue consists primarily of fresh water marsh that is divided by a series of dykes. Low hedgerows are located between most of the marsh compartments. The agricultural lands south of 44th Avenue are managed for the benefit of wildlife. The Serpentine River forms the northern boundary of SWA. A small remnant of salt marsh is located in a bend of the Serpentine River.

SWA is identified and signed as a wildlife viewing site of **British Columbia Wildlife Watch**, the provincial wildlife viewing program. There is good wildlife viewing throughout the year. SWA is located in one of Canada's most densely populated wintering areas for waterfowl, raptors and shorebirds. Shorebird and waterfowl use in SWA increases during high tides in nearby Boundary Bay

The Coastal Office of Ducks Unlimited Canada is located at the Serpentine Wildlife Area.

A bird checklist is available for SWA listing the species that have been observed and their seasonal frequencies. As of March 1994, 175 bird species have been recorded.

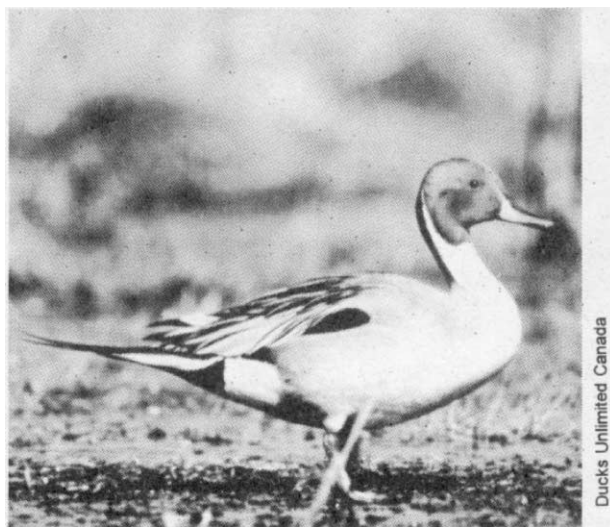
### History

Before 1961, the area was privately owned and used for mixed farming and for hay production. In 1961 the Ministry of Transportation and Highways purchased the lands that now make up SWA for the Highway 99 construction project.

In November 1966, management of the area was transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Branch. Public use of the area was encouraged, and consisted mainly of pheasant and waterfowl hunting.

The enhancement of the land for fish and wildlife management purposes began in the early 1970's and involved cooperation between Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Fish and Wildlife Branch, and the Douglas College Institute of Environmental Studies. In 1972, the first major project at SWA was the Fraser Valley Canada Goose Restoration Project. It involved extensive dyking and water level management to provide fresh water marsh habitat for waterfowl.

Today SWA has a system of interior dykes that allow for the adjustment of water levels in different portions of the marsh. Seasonal water draw-downs, combined with specific vegetation plantings, have resulted in the establishment of productive waterfowl habitat, particularly for nesting and wintering birds. Areas of old field habitat provide foraging opportunities for raptors. Hedgerows located between the compartments provide habitat for songbirds, as well as perching sites for, raptors. Through careful management, agricultural activities and wildlife use co-exist in the-lands south of 44th Avenue.



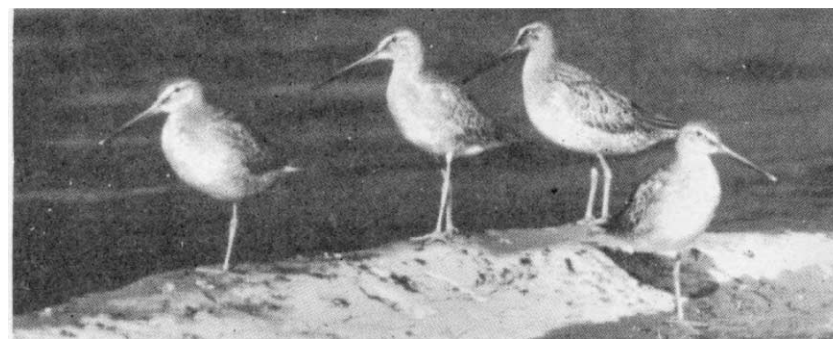
Northern Pintail duck.

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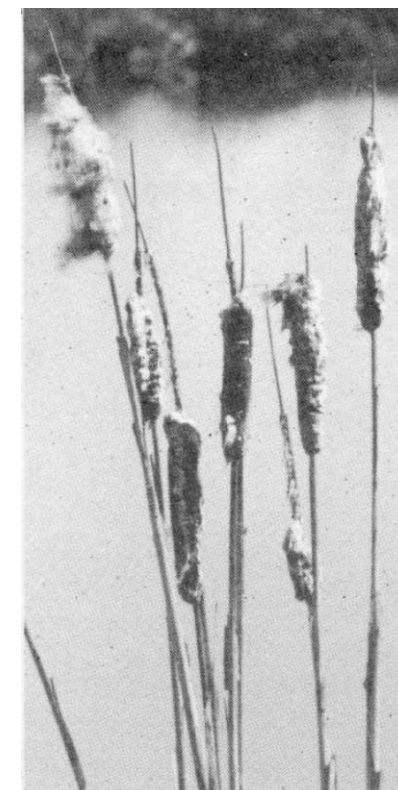
Aerial view looking southward.

Ducks Unlimited Canada



Dowitchers.

Canadian Wildlife Service



Bullrush cattails.

Ducks Unlimited Canada

### Wildlife Viewing Highlights

SWA is an excellent area to observe a wide range of wildlife species throughout the year. The following are some of the viewing highlights:

**Great Blue Heron** - Herons are visible throughout the year hunting in the marshes, ditches and fields, and along the Serpentine River.

**Cormorants** - Double-crested Cormorants are often visible, especially when drying their outstretched wings while sitting on pilings in the river.

**Waterfowl** - SWA provides important habitat for many waterfowl species, including Canada Goose, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Bufflehead and Common Merganser. While many species nest in the area, the best viewing periods are during the spring and fall migrations, and during the winter months.

**Owls** - Both Barn Owls and Short-eared Owls nest in the area. Short-eared Owls are active during daylight and are more likely to be viewed. Barn Owls are more commonly observed at dusk.

**Hawks** - This area is used by many hawk species.

Northern Harriers and Red-tailed Hawks may be viewed throughout the year. Rough-legged, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are visible in the fall and winter months.

**Shorebirds** - SWA is used by a wide range of shorebird species, particularly during the spring and fall migration periods. This is a good place to look for rare and vagrant species.

**Songbirds** - Passerine species may be observed throughout the year. The -greatestdiversity of songbirds occurs in late spring and through the summer. Listen for the easily identified calls of the Marsh Wren and Red-winged Blackbird.

**Muskrats** - Muskrat activities are easily observed in the marsh, especially in the early evening.

**Coyotes** - Coyotes are frequently seen along the dykes and in the open fields hunting for small mammals.

**Harbour Seals** - Throughout the year harbour seals may be seen in the Serpentine River.

**Frogs** - Bullfrog choruses are heard in the spring, especially at dusk. They are visible in the marshes most spring and summer days.



**British Columbia Wildlife Watch** is the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks' program designed to promote viewing opportunities within British Columbia. The protection of wildlife and their habitat, and a positive, safe experience for the viewer are the primary objectives of this program. Many local communities, other agencies and public conservation groups are involved. For more information on this or other wildlife viewing sites, contact the Regional BC Environment office in Surrey [(604) 582-5200 or 1-800-665-7027; #300-10334-152A Street, Surrey, B.C. V3R 7P8].

### Viewing Ethics for Conservation

Wildlife viewing demands courtesy and common sense.

For the well being of the wildlife and habitats please follow these guidelines:

- Be Considerate of Wildlife** - Use binoculars to view wildlife from a distance rather than approaching them too closely.
- Be Considerate of Habitat** - Plants and the landscape are important parts of wildlife habitat. Please do not damage or remove them, and stay on designated trails or roads.
- Be Considerate of Other People** - Respect private property and the wildlife viewing activities of others.
- Control Pets** - Pets can harm wildlife and hinder viewing opportunities.
- Do Not Approach Young Wildlife** - Young wildlife are rarely 'abandoned' or lost. An adult is usually at a safe distance waiting for you to leave.

### Tips for Wildlife Viewers

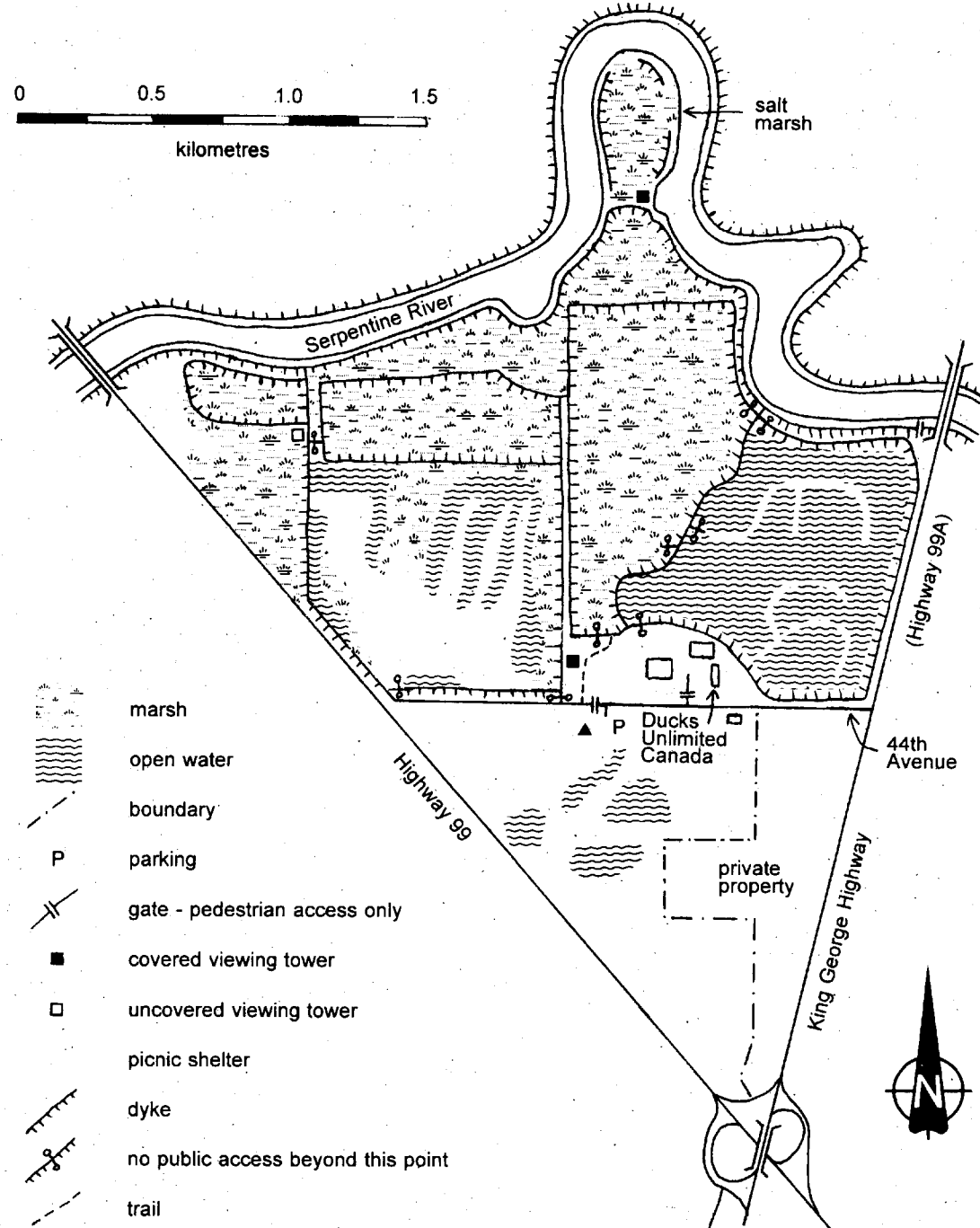
These tips will improve your chances of seeing wildlife in their natural habitats. Remember, wildlife are 'wild' and they may choose not to be seen.

**Choose the Right Season and Time of Day** - Many species are most active during the cooler morning and evening hours. A hot, dry, sunny afternoon is usually not the best time to look for wildlife.

**Be Patient and Be Quiet** - Wildlife may be difficult to observe even though you have heard the species or detected their signs. If you remain still and quiet, wildlife will determine that you are no threat, and may become active and more visible.

**Use Binoculars or a Spotting Scope** - Visual aids can let you scan wide areas and will increase your chances to observe wildlife without disturbing them.

**Move Slowly and Reduce Visibility** - Wildlife will usually sense your presence long before you have sensed theirs. Most animals have a keen sense of hearing and smell, and most birds and large mammals have keen sight.



### Access and Facilities

To access the Serpentine Wildlife Area from Highway 99, take the King George Highway (Highway 99A) exit north. From the King George Highway turn west onto 44th Avenue and continue to the parking area on the left. The parking area is closed to public vehicle access after dark.

A dyke trail system leads through the interior of the marsh to three viewing towers, two of which are covered. A covered picnic shelter is located at the 44th Avenue parking lot. There are no washrooms.

Some areas are closed to the public year-round to prevent disturbance to wildlife. Please respect these closures.

**Do not leave valuables or personal items in your vehicle.**

### Recreation

A number of recreational activities are permitted within SWA, including walking, wildlife viewing, nature study, and jogging. Cyclists are asked to keep to the Serpentine River dyke and to 44th Avenue. Pets must be kept on a leash at all times.

There is no boat or canoe use permitted within the marshes. No hunting or trapping is permitted within the boundaries of SWA.

### Ducks Unlimited Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada is a private, non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation, restoration, enhancement and management of waterfowl habitat in Canada. Since 1937, the organization has been financed by the contributions of conservationists, corporations, foundations and governments agencies throughout North America, resulting in more than 7 million hectares of protected habitat from coast to coast.

This brochure has been produced by *British Columbia Wildlife Watch* with the financial assistance of Ducks Unlimited Canada [Coastal Office (604) 591-1104; W.R.P.S. Box 39530, White Rock, B.C. V4A 9P3].



Ducks Unlimited Canada

The *Federation of British Columbia Naturalists Foundation* supports the goals, objectives and activities of *British Columbia Wildlife Watch*.