



Nature's *filters*

Wetlands are a critical component of a healthy natural environment

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Sackville Waterfowl Park lies literally in the shadows of the beautiful architecture of Sackville, New Brunswick. The town almost completely surrounds this rich natural habitat.



A northern shoveler drake showing its enormous namesake bill. This spectacular duck is among some thirty species of birds nesting within the waterfowl park.



Wetlands

Wetlands are not mosquito factories that should be drained—they are among the richest of all ecosystems, buzzing with many different species, brimming with subtle beauty and complex beyond comprehension.

They are the natural filters that supply and purify our drinking water, regulate flooding and in the case of salt marshes, buffer against coastal erosion...

...They are also disappearing from this continent at a rate of more than 150 acres every hour (that's about 110 football fields), destroyed and displaced by human encroachment.

Nevertheless, many wetlands hang on, providing homes for a multitude of species, includes millions of waterfowl.

Many cities and towns found along lakeshores, seacoasts and rivers are also adjacent to what remains of natural wetlands. In fact, thousands of Atlantic Canadians pass by some sort of wetland ecosystem on their daily commute, often sadly oblivious to the stunning wealth of biota (animal and plant life) just a stone's throw away.

Wetlands, and the plethora of wildlife that inhabits them, are vital reminders of a parallel world completely independent of our human existence.

When such a natural community is also an integral part of a vibrant human community, something special happens. The boundary between wild and civilized, natural and synthetic begins to disappear.

This is exactly what has happened in the university town of Sackville, New Brunswick. A winner of Environment Canada's Award for Environmental Achievement, the 55-acre Sackville Waterfowl Park was established in 1988, a joint venture of the Town of Sackville and Ducks Unlimited.

Originally part of the vast tidal Tantramar salt marsh, the site on which Sackville Waterfowl Park sits was drained in the 1700s to become agricultural pasture, and remained so until its final transformation into a freshwater waterfowl impoundment just a few decades ago.

Since then it has attracted hundreds of species of wildlife, and thousands of human visitors who stroll the wetland's four-kilometre kilometre network of boardwalks and trails



Top: Being so close at hand with enjoyable, easy to stroll trails, the park offers the residents of this university town a convenient place to connect with nature. Above: the healthy waters are an ideal home to several frog species, including the green frog.

Right: Songbirds like this yellow warbler abound, attracted by an abundance of shrubs, insect-supporting flowering plants, and trees of various shapes and sizes.





Winding through a dense growth of cattails, the longest boardwalk in the wetland begins just steps from downtown Sackville.

Painted turtles, our most colourful species, haul out on old stumps, mud banks and grass clumps throughout Sackville Waterfowl Park.



In a spring mating ritual, a common green darner female is being clasped behind the head by the tail of a male. Several species of dragonflies and damselflies live in the wetland.



...sanctuary of biodiversity...



A lesser yellowlegs scratching its "chin" as it visits the Sackville Waterfowl Park during fall migration.

for a glimpse of their favourite creatures. This all takes place quite literally in the shadows of Sackville's stately homes, churches, and university buildings.

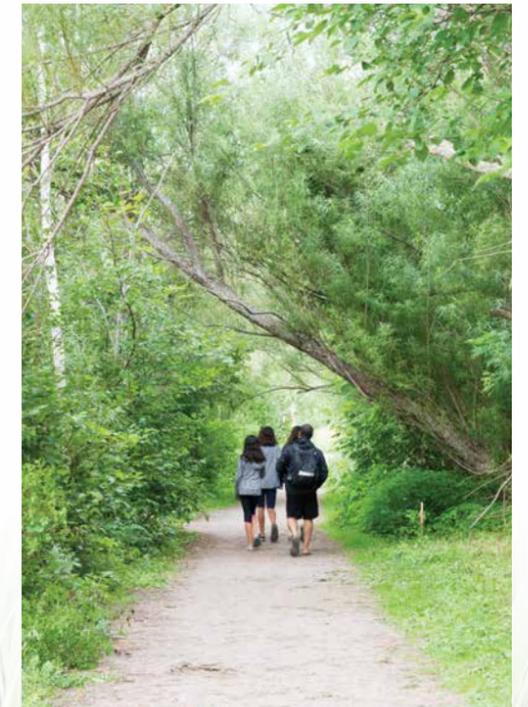
For many, birds are the main attraction, for they are the most easily observed. Unlike mammals, which tend to be shy and retiring, and usually nocturnal or active at twilight, most birds are out and about during daylight hours, and in a wetland there are fewer trees in which they can hide.

As the naturalist David Attenborough said of our avian friends, "They are lively; they are lovely; they are everywhere." They are indeed "everywhere" within the waterfowl park. Nearly 200 species of birds have been observed here, with about 30 confirmed breeders including northern shovellers, green-winged teals, black ducks, American wigeons, ring-necked ducks, pied-billed grebes, common snipes, sora rails, tree swallows, kingbirds, yellow warblers and swamp sparrows, and many others.

But this priceless, compact sanctuary of biodiversity also provides a home for muskrats, dragonflies, bees and other pollinators, along with a diverse selection of frogs and even a few turtles.

Sackville waterfowl park (or any easily accessed wildlife habitat in close proximity to people) is proof that protecting even a small natural ecosystem is good for both wild species and humans. It's a place where wildlife is safe and thousands of people every year can connect with the natural world and be astonished by its beauty and diversity.

We should have more of them. 🐾



A local family walks through some of the mixed woods found in the sanctuary. Vibrant ecosystems like this are great natural classrooms, where nature and its processes are on display for all to see.