

A NATURE ALBERTA
CHECKLIST



IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIODIVERSITY AREAS OF ALBERTA

Use this Checklist as your guide to explore
and discover the fascinating natural
history and biodiversity of our province.



NATURE
ALBERTA

A COMMUNITY CONNECTED BY A LOVE OF NATURE

The year was 1970. Six nature clubs came together to form the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. More than four decades later, and now known as Nature Alberta, we are grateful for the clubs, the people and the history that has enabled this organization to become the voice for the greater appreciation and conservation of Alberta's natural environment. We strive to connect Albertans with the natural world that exists all around us. By encouraging Albertans to learn more about and understand natural history and ecological processes, we help ensure that Alberta's natural heritage and its biodiversity is widely enjoyed, deeply appreciated and thoroughly protected.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nature Alberta gratefully acknowledges the many individuals and organizations who have contributed to this project.

Special thanks to Rob Worona and Margot Hervieux for contributing their time and expertise to reviewing and editing this publication.

Thank you also to all of the volunteer IBA Caretakers, past, present and future, who commit to monitoring and stewarding these important natural areas.

This project would also not have been possible without the generous support of our partners, including TD Friends of the Environment and Alberta Conservation Association.



Encouraging Albertans to Live Green



TD Friends of the
Environment
Foundation

Cover photo: Yellow-rumped Warbler, D. Godkin

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SOURCES

Information contained within this Checklist has been compiled from the following and other sources as annotated within the publication:

BirdLife IBA Important Bird Area Alberta Guide booklet ©2014 Nature Alberta

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in Canada <https://www.ibacanada.org/>

Bird Life International website and Data Zone <http://www.birdlife.org/>



IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIODIVERSITY AREAS OF ALBERTA

Alberta is a large province with varied habitats and exploring its biodiversity is an immense undertaking. Together, Nature Alberta and our partners have prepared this Checklist in hopes of inspiring Albertans to get out and discover the natural beauty of this great province.

Alberta is fortunate to have an abundance of natural areas which support a broad range of birds and wildlife. The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) program in Alberta is one way in which we help support and promote the protection and conservation of natural areas that are essential habitat for important bird populations, which have been shown to be effective indicators of wider biodiversity.

This checklist introduces you to the world of IBAs, and highlights a fascinating piece of our province's natural history, specifically Alberta's IBAs, that we hope you will take the time to learn about, experience and enjoy.

IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIODIVERSITY AREAS PROGRAM

The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) Program is a worldwide effort to identify, monitor and conserve the world's most important sites for birds and biodiversity.

The IBA Program was initiated in the 1980s by BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organizations (NGOs) that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. In Canada, national IBA partners include Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada.

The BirdLife International Data Zone identifies 325 IBA sites across Canada. The majority of these are discrete sites at which significant numbers of birds regularly breed, congregate or pass through on migration. Canada's IBAs have been identified because they support significant numbers of threatened birds or birds restricted by range or by habitat. To learn more about the national IBA program, please visit the IBA Canada website <https://www.ibacanada.org/>.

IBAs IN ALBERTA

There are currently 47 IBAs identified in Alberta¹. These sites are recognized as internationally and nationally significant for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds or critical habitat for bird species at risk. More than 90% of Alberta's birds migrate each year making bird conservation an international issue. We can do our part by making sure important bird habitat and associated biodiversity is protected here in Alberta.

¹ <https://www.ibacanada.org/explore.jsp?prov=AB>

VISIT AN IBA

Alberta's IBAs are part of the largest global network of important sites for biodiversity and we encourage you to experience them. Whether you are a seasoned birder or casually interested in what nature has to offer, IBAs present a unique opportunity for people of all ages to experience the beauty of Alberta's natural environment and rich biodiversity. Many IBAs are fairly accessible and IBA site maps are available at ibacanada.ca. If an IBA is located on private land, be sure to ask permission from the landowner before accessing.

WHAT IS AN IBA?

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are:

- Places of international significance for the conservation of birds and biodiversity.
- Recognized worldwide as practical tools for conservation.
- Distinct areas amenable to practical conservation action.
- Identified using standardized criteria.

Across Canada, IBAs have been used to design conservation reserve networks and to prioritize lands for acquisition. They have also been used by governments in assessing impacts and establishing guidelines for proposed development projects.

CARING FOR IBAs

Caretaker networks are currently in place in every province in Canada and most of these programs are run by provincial nature conservation organizations. Nature Alberta is doing its part in our role as the provincial coordinator of IBAs in Alberta. We recruit and work closely with volunteer IBA Caretakers, enlist community and government support for IBA conservation, and oversee the review of IBA site summary information in the province.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

Integral to the program, the IBA Caretakers are a dynamic network of individuals with a passion for Alberta's natural areas. Caretakers may be members of naturalist clubs, landowners living near IBAs or just have an interest in conservation. They are the eyes, ears, feet and hands on the ground who volunteer their time to monitor bird populations and habitat, report on threats and build awareness of local IBAs in their communities.

Ideally, a Caretaker or a Caretaker Group is familiar with and is situated close to the IBA, and has the means to visit the IBA with some frequency (e.g., at least a couple of times a year or seasonally). On those visits, the Caretaker fills out a site evaluation form, which provides Nature Alberta with pertinent information about the site.

If you are interested learning more about or becoming an IBA Caretaker, visit naturealberta.ca or email birds@naturealberta.ca for more information.

PRINCIPLES OF BIRDING ETHICS

As a conservation-driven organization, Nature Alberta believes that by following these practices you help promote the health and well-being of birds and other animals, humans and habitat while out in the field. When visiting natural areas, you must always ensure your presence makes as little impact as possible upon the natural environment, and on the animals and plants that inhabit the area.

This means you will have to have some basic knowledge of natural areas and use good judgment. The following principles provide guidance on how to best treat and experience Alberta's natural areas, while ensuring that future generations will also have the privilege of enjoying them.

- Learn patterns of animal behaviour and know how to avoid interfering with their life cycles.
- Understand which wildlife species are most sensitive to disturbance and when they are most sensitive (e.g. nesting season).
- Stay on trails intended for human use whenever possible – this helps preserve the rest of the natural area – and abide by all posted signage.
- Understand the provisions of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act and Species at Risk Act to ensure the appropriate protection of wildlife and habitats.
- Understand the status of wildlife in Alberta, including what species in Alberta are at risk.
- Be prepared for unexpected events – this is an easy way to avoid preventable accidents or other mishaps.
- Inform those you notice engaging in harmful or risky behaviour that may endanger themselves or the wildlife.
- Report inappropriate behaviour to authorities. Violations of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act, or Species At Risk Act should be reported to Report a Poacher (1-800-642-3800).
- Do not trespass on private property. Always ask permission to access private property.
- Do not damage trees, vegetation or nests.
- Treat all wildlife, plants, places and people with respect.

People who enjoy being active in nature must always respect wildlife, the environment and the rights of others. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the American Birding Association Code of Birding Ethics.

IBAs IN ALBERTA'S BOREAL REGION

Covering more than half of the province, Alberta's boreal region typically conjures up images of vast expanses of dense, green forest, but this region is much more diverse than that. Stretching from the northern half of the province down into central Alberta, the boreal region consists of mixed-wood forests, wetlands and numerous lakes and rivers.

All four major North American flyways – bird migration paths – converge in Alberta's boreal region. As a result, millions of migratory birds visit the area every year to nest. A variety of birds also make this habitat their home all year-round. All told, the boreal region hosts a spectacular amount of biodiversity including many species of waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds and songbirds. It also provides habitat for endangered or otherwise rare species like whooping cranes, trumpeter swans and peregrine falcons.

To date, 15 IBAs have been officially designated in Alberta's boreal region. This includes Alberta's most northern IBA, Hay-Zama Lakes. It also includes Alberta's two largest IBAs – the Peace-Athabasca Delta covering an area of 7,585 km² and Lesser Slave Lake with an area of 2,019 km².



1. **CARDINAL LAKE** | PAGE 8
2. **FRANK LAKE NORTH** | PAGE 10
3. **GRANDE PRAIRIE-
TRUMPETER SWAN** | PAGE 12
4. **HAY AND ZAMA
LAKES** | PAGE 14
5. **KIMIWAN LAKE** | PAGE 16
6. **LAC LA BICHE** | PAGE 18
7. **LAKELAND** | PAGE 20
8. **LESSER SLAVE LAKE
PROVINCIAL PARK** | PAGE 22
9. **MINISTIK, JOSEPH
AND OLIVER LAKES** | PAGE 24
10. **MIQUELON LAKE** | PAGE 26
11. **MURIEL LAKE** | PAGE 28
12. **PEACE-ATHABASCA
DELTA** | PAGE 30
13. **PELICAN LAKE** | PAGE 32
14. **UTIKUMA AND
UTIKUMASIS LAKES** | PAGE 34
15. **WHITFORD AND
RUSH LAKES** | PAGE 36



CARDINAL LAKE

Located 20 km west of Peace River
in northwestern Alberta

Latitude 56.242 | Longitude -117.731 | Size: 94 km²

*Globally significant for large waterfowl
concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

Cardinal Lake, known locally as Lac Cardinal, is a shallow, large lake (50 km²). Its waters are drained through the Whitemud River into the Peace River. A large portion of the land surrounding the lake is used for agriculture, but there are some small freshwater marshes interspersed with mixed wood forests throughout the area.

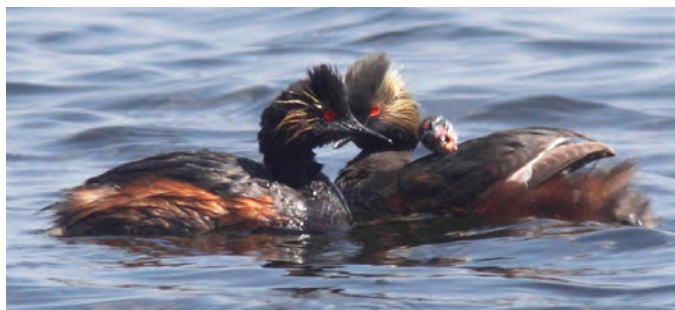
BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA boasts upwards of 160 species and is particularly busy during migration periods. It is globally significant for its annual fall migrations of ducks and has been designated as a key staging wetland by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Greater White-fronted, Canada and Snow geese, as well as

Trumpeter and Tundra swans, stage here in the fall. Small colonies of Eared Grebes and Franklin's Gulls breed in the spring. Eared Grebes are visually striking in the summer. These small birds are mostly black and reddish-brown, with golden tufts of feathers near their ears. Like Franklin's Gulls, they build floating nests anchored to vegetation beneath the surface of the water.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Part of the land around the northeast shore is maintained as a Conservation Site by Alberta Conservation Association and its partners. Queen Elizabeth Provincial Park is maintained by Alberta Parks on the south shore and provides excellent habitat for songbirds as well as gulls and shorebirds. Work completed by Ducks Unlimited Canada identifies Cardinal Lake as being internationally significant post-breeding habitat for Barrow's Goldeneye.



Eared Grebes

Photo: C. Artuso



Tundra Swans Photo: D. Fairless



FRANK LAKE NORTH

Located 20 km from Nampa in northern Alberta

Latitude 55.91 | Longitude -116.892 | Size: 114 km²

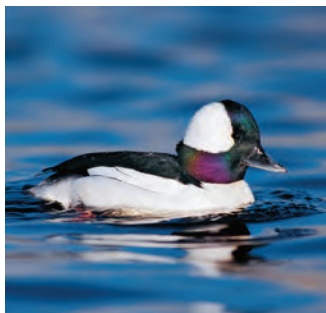
Continently significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

Frank Lake is a small, isolated lake surrounded by mixed forests, bogs and muskeg of Black Spruce and poplar; on the south side are wetlands which drain to a creek via marshlands. The site is in the boreal zone and is mostly flat terrain with hummocky soil.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Up to 120 species of birds may be found in this IBA throughout the year. The area is continentally significant for Tundra Swans. During fall migration, from 1,500 to 2,000 birds (between 1 and 2% of the western population) can be regularly observed on the lake. A pair of Trumpeter Swans breeds on the lake each year. Spring migrations bring Canada Geese, Buffleheads and White-winged Scoters. Buffleheads are a type of diving duck common in North America. While breeding, males are mostly white, but have black wings and distinctive iridescent feathers from the neck up,



Bufflehead Photo: DUC



Yellow-rumped Warbler Photo: D. Godkin



Tundra Swans Photo: D.Fairless

with a large white patch across the back and sides of their head. Red-necked Grebes also occasionally nest in the area in small numbers. Many neotropical songbirds also feed alongside the lake during migration. High counts of 50 Yellow-rumped Warblers have been noted during the spring passage. A number of interesting mammals are found in the area including Elk, Moose, Gray Wolf, Lynx and White-tailed and Mule deer.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Alberta Conservation Association maintains and manages an 800 acre Conservation Area surrounding the lake. Wildlife habitat enhancement clearings have been completed at this site to improve ungulate winter range².

² <http://www.albertadiscoverguide.com/site.cfm?grid=C2&number=101>



GRANDE PRAIRIE — TRUMPETER SWAN

Located 25 km from Grande Prairie in northwest Alberta

Latitude 55.291 | Longitude -119.104 | Size: 1,308 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species
and large waterfowl concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA, a mix of parkland and mixed wood forests, includes several lakes. These lakes range greatly in size, from small 500 metre ponds, to the 10 kilometre-long Bear Lake. Saskatoon Lake was designated a Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary in 1948. Today, Saskatoon Island Provincial Park offers birding and other recreational activities to local residents and visitors alike.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Although more than 150 species have been recorded here, the area is most notable for its Trumpeter Swans, who return in the spring to breed in the area and remain until their fall migration. Using peak numbers recorded between 1996 and 1998, an average of 237 Trumpeter Swans have been recorded in the area – over



Trumpeter Swan Photo: Nature Alberta

1% of the estimated global population of Trumpeter Swans and about 7% of the Rocky Mountain population. Ducks and geese can number as high as 20,000 in the area throughout the year. American Coots and Canvasbacks are common in the fall. Tundra Swans have been recorded here as well. American Coots may resemble ducks, but they are a different type of water bird, more closely related to rails than ducks. They are almost entirely black or dark brown in colour, with thick white bills.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Friends of Saskatoon Island and Alberta Environment and Parks organize an annual Swan Festival to celebrate the return of the Trumpeters to this area. The Peace Parkland Naturalists lead birding tours and counts in the area. Ducks Unlimited Canada has a conservation site on Bear Lake.



HAY AND ZAMA LAKES

Located 120 km west of High Level in
northwest Alberta

Latitude 58.774 | Longitude -119.023 | Size: 608 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species
and large waterfowl concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

The remote Hay and Zama Lakes area includes a complex of rivers, lakes and wetlands in northwestern Alberta. Depending on yearly fluctuations, much of the area can be open water, with banks of sedge, cattails, and willows or balsam poplar and trembling aspen on higher ground.

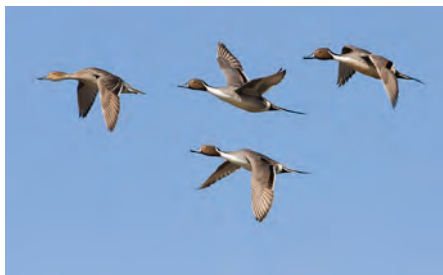
BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This area was designated a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance in 1982, due to the extremely high numbers of waterfowl using the area. Hundreds of thousands of geese and ducks from three of four North American migration flyways use this IBA for staging (resting and feeding) during their spring and fall migrations. Ducks Unlimited Canada estimates that as many

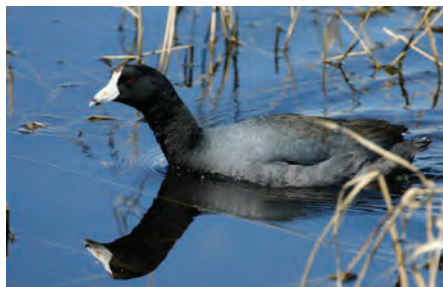
as 1,000,000 birds may pass through this area every fall. This includes Canada, Snow and Greater White-fronted geese and a number of duck and shorebird species. Bonaparte, Franklin's and Ring-billed Gulls, Common Terns and various hawks and eagles also nest here throughout the summer. Neotropical songbirds, travelling from South and Central America to breed in the boreal forest, nest in the willows and poplar stands. Trumpeter Swans, an At-Risk species, have been recorded as migrants in this area. The site is a movement corridor for ungulates, and has good habitat for Woodland Caribou and Wood Bison (one of few wild populations). A herd of bison reintroduced in this area in the 1980s continue to thrive here today.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Although there are currently few roads or facilities into this area, the Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Provincial Park was established here in 1999³.



Northern Pintail Photo: G. Romanchuk



American Coot Photo: C. Priestley

³ http://www.albertaparks.ca/media/2661/HayZama_web.pdf



KIMIWAN LAKE

Located at McLennan in north-central Alberta

Latitude 55.754 | Longitude -116.918 | Size: 51 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species as well as large concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds

GEOGRAPHY

Kimiwan Lake is a large freshwater lake situated beside the town of McLennan, Alberta, about 135 km northeast of Grande Prairie. Along most of the shoreline, the lakeshore is characterized by marsh and mud flat habitats. The surrounding landscape is a mix of agricultural land and boreal forest, with dominant species including white spruce, balsam fir and trembling aspen.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

As many as 233 species of birds have been observed in the Kimiwan Lake IBA, with some of those species numbering in the tens of thousands. The area hosts globally significant populations of waterfowl who use the area to moult in the summer. Dabbling and diving ducks, Canada Geese, and Tundra and Trumpeter Swans are among the most common species. Shorebirds, mostly

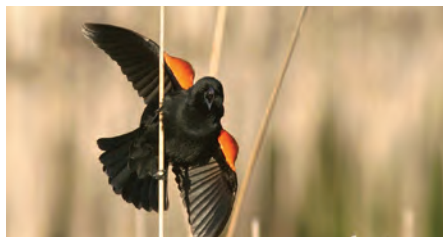


Barrow's Goldeneye Photo: ACA

Pectoral Sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitchers, are also found during fall migration periods. Long-billed Dowitchers can be distinguished from other sandpipers by their extremely long beaks. Flocks of the Long-billed species also constantly chatter together while feeding. Populations of songbirds can also be found in the area and include Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow Warblers, Least Flycatchers, and many sparrow species. Non-breeding Franklin's Gulls are abundant during the summer.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Kimiwan Lake Naturalists, a not-for-profit society, operates an Interpretive Centre and extensive birdwalk on the south shore of the lake. Kimiwan Lake has been recognized as a natural area at the provincial level, and it is the most northerly of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sites in the prairies.



Red-winged Blackbird
Photo: C. Artuso

LAC LA BICHE

Located outside Lac La Biche, 95 km east of Athabasca in north-central Alberta

Latitude 54.87 | Longitude -112.073 | Size: 396 km²

Globally and nationally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

Lac La Biche is a large lake in central Alberta situated within the southern boreal forest region. It has numerous bays, and many rocky offshore islands. In some of the shallower areas protected by wind and wave action, extensive stands of emergent vegetation have formed. Coniferous and mixed forest surrounds the lake and is present on the larger islands. Typical tree species include White and Black Spruce, poplars and birch. Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park overlaps with the IBA around the eastern basin of the lake.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Lac La Biche is an important breeding area for many different birds, including California Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants,

Western and Eared Grebes, Great Blue Herons, and smaller numbers of Osprey, Bald Eagles, and various warbler species. Often the most commonly seen heron, the Great Blue Heron, is usually found singly or in small groupings. It is large and grey in colour, with a black plume of feathers on the top of its head.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

This area was first designated as a Migratory Bird Sanctuary in 1922 by the Government of Canada, and the province designated the area a provincial bird sanctuary in 1930⁴. The Lac La Biche Birding Society is a local non-profit group that works towards educating the community about the birds and natural history of the area. The Society organizes annual Christmas and May species counts, work with schools and parks on leading and sharing information about bird populations in the area.



Great Blue Heron Photo: ACA



Osprey
Photo: K. Pride

4 <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/library/egovdocs/2009/alts/174176.pdf>



LAKELAND

Located 35 km from Lac La Biche in
north-central Alberta

Latitude 54.73 | Longitude -111.41 | Size: 740 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

Some of the highest-quality lakes, beaches and shorelines in Alberta are found in Lakeland Provincial Park and adjacent recreation area which both contain numerous lakes and wetlands. This area of mixed wood and old growth forest is home to more than 200 bird species and a diverse range of boreal forest mammals.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

IBA status was granted due to the importance of the area as a breeding ground for Red-necked Grebes. This area hosts about 2% of the North American population of Red-necked Grebes during the breeding season, or around 800 birds. Red-necked Grebes are distinctive during the breeding season. Their bodies are brown in colour, while their heads are black on top with white cheeks. As

their name implies, their necks are bright red. American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants are also common waterfowl during the summer. This area is also unique for its diversity of boreal bird species. A draft bird checklist for the Lakeland area includes 251 species. Other species of note include Bald Eagles, Broad-winged Hawks, Barred and Boreal Owls, 16 species of warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, and Winter Wrens. In the fall, Common Loons may be spotted.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Alberta Environment and Parks maintains Lakeland Provincial Park which covers 147 square kilometres and includes Jackson, Kinnaird, McGuffin, Shaw, Dabbs, Helena and Blackett lakes. The park focuses on primitive wilderness recreation and features Alberta's only backcountry canoe circuit⁵. They also maintain Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area, at 443 square kilometres, the largest provincial recreation area in Alberta.

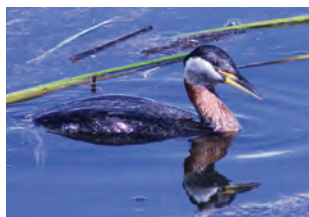


Barred Owl



American White Pelicans

Photo: T. Vallevand



Red-necked Grebe Photo: P. Jones

⁵ <https://www.albertaparks.ca/media/3628825/lakeland-canoe-circuit.pdf>



LESSER SLAVE LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK

Located near the Town of Slave Lake in
north-central Alberta

Latitude 55.44 | Longitude -115.376 | Size: 2,019 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species and
nationally significant for congregatory species
and large waterfowl concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

Surrounding the third largest lake in Alberta, the Lesser Slave Lake IBA is the second largest IBA in the province. The town of Slave Lake is near the southeastern corner and several small communities are located along the highway that runs along the south shore. The northern shore of this relatively shallow (20 m) lake is steeper and often rockier than the shallower southern shore, which contains various marsh communities. Sandy beaches and dunes are found at the eastern end of the lake. In Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park (at the eastern end of the lake) and all around the lake, are hilly mixed wood forests of Trembling Aspen, Balsam Poplar, Balsam Fir, White Spruce and Black Spruce. At the western end of the lake there is a rich delta leading into Buffalo Bay. Both marsh and swamp habitats are represented here.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Around 200 species of land birds and water birds can be found here. Tundra Swans are present during spring and fall migrations in large numbers, potentially representing around 1-2% of the North American population. In addition, some of the largest numbers of Western Grebes in the province breed in the area. Other waterfowl such as Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Common and Forster's Terns pass through in moderate numbers during migration. The lake and its associated shoreline provide excellent habitat for breeding Bald Eagles and Ospreys. In August 1997, a survey of the lake and nearby shorelines produced an estimated 72 Bald Eagles. The forested areas harbor dozens of species of land birds, including 20 species of warblers, White-throated Sparrows, and Least Flycatchers. During migration, good concentrations of songbirds move between the eastern edge of the lake and Marten Mountain.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, established in 1994, is active in forest bird research, education, and conservation. They also organize an annual Songbird Festival in the late spring. Alberta Environment and Parks operates the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation – an educational and research facility strategically located to study boreal birds on their breeding grounds.



Bald Eagle

Photo: Alberta Conservation Association



Northern Harrier Photo: C. Artuso



MINISTIK, JOSEPH AND OLIVER LAKES

Located 20 km southeast of Edmonton in
central Alberta

Latitude 53.322 | Longitude -113.009 | Size: 107 km²

*Globally significant for large waterfowl
concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

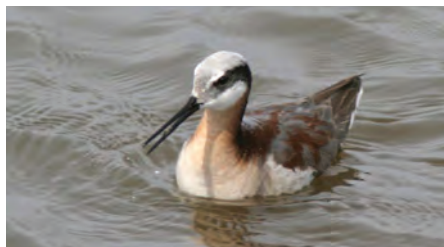
A number of small to medium sized lakes are also included in this IBA. Ministik Lake is a saline lake with alkaline shorelines, emergent vegetation, wet meadows, and shallow marshes. The topography is knob and kettle with lakes, ponds, wetlands interspersed with upland forest.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Double-crested Cormorants, California Gulls and American White Pelicans breed here in relatively abundant numbers during the spring. American White Pelicans can be found roosting on sandbars or small sandy islands, and feed in shallow, sheltered waters. They are usually found in small groups. The area is significant for its waterfowl populations, including dabbling ducks



Moose Photo: D. Godkin



Wilson's Phalarope

Photo: C. Artuso

and Tundra Swans, for which the IBA is an important spring and fall staging area. Moose and White-tailed Deer use the key habitat surrounding the lakes.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Located within the boundaries of the Beaver Hills Biosphere, Ministik Lake (along with Miquelon Lake) was designated the first Provincial Game Bird Sanctuary in 1911. A wildlife management plan for the sanctuary was created in 1989 to set principles for managing the site for waterfowl, partially by putting restrictions and controls on incompatible uses.



MIQUELON LAKE

Located 20 km from Camrose in central Alberta

Latitude 53.253 | Longitude -112.894 | Size: 30 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and colonial waterbirds

GEOGRAPHY

Miquelon Lake is actually three separate lake basins located 11 km east-northeast of the town of Hay Lakes and 20 km north of the city of Camrose. There is well developed road access, especially at the southern and eastern sides where Miquelon Lake Provincial Park is located. The park consists of aspen covered hills, ponds and marshes. The lakes are shallow and saline, with maximum depths of 6 m, extensive emergent vegetation, and exposed mudflats. The surrounding lands include pockets of upland forest. Forest cover is predominantly trembling aspen, balsam poplar and white spruce.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

More than 200 bird species visit the park annually. California and Ring-billed gulls breed here in significant numbers. Sanderlings and Red-necked Phalaropes also use the area during summer migration. Unlike most bird species, phalaropes exhibit sex-role

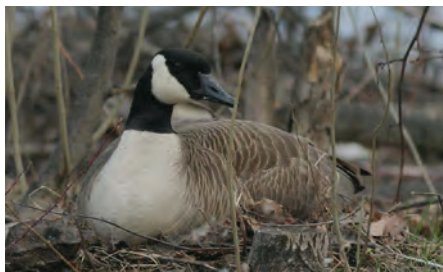


Wilson's Phalarope Photo: C. Artuso

reversal, so females are more vibrantly coloured than the males, and the males actually incubate and rear the young. Thousands of ducks have been recorded staging during spring and fall migrations. A small number of Canada Geese nest here every year as well.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Along with Ministik Lake, Miquelon Lake was designated the first Provincial Game Bird Sanctuary in 1911. Maintained by Alberta Environment and Parks, Miquelon Lake Provincial Park, at the southern and eastern sides of the Lake, overlaps the IBA, providing access for recreation. Miquelon Lake is also located within the boundaries of the Beaver Hills Biosphere, a designated UNESCO biosphere reserve.



Canada Goose Photo: C. Artuso

MURIEL LAKE

Located 18 km from Bonnyville in
north-east Alberta

Latitude 54.146 | Longitude -110.681 | Size: 98 km²

*Nationally significant for shorebird concentrations
and the threatened Piping Plover*

GEOGRAPHY

Muriel Lake is located about 200 km northeast of Edmonton near the Town of Bonnyville. The lake is a large body of freshwater, with small offshore islands and sand and gravel bars in the southeast corner and in the northwest bay. The surrounding landscape is a mosaic of agricultural fields and uncultivated land. Areas of shrub thickets and aspen groves are interspersed throughout.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Muriel Lake is an important area for colonial waterfowl and shorebirds. Many gulls breed here, including California, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Herring Gulls can be distinguished from California and Ring-billed species by their large size and pink legs. They also have no black on their bills, just a red dot



Ring-Billed Gull Photo: Pettitt

near the tip. Western Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons and Piping Plovers also nest in the area, while Franklin's Gulls, Common Terns, and American White Pelicans can be spotted in small numbers during the summer. The endangered Piping Plover has been recorded at this site in the past.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Muriel Lake Basin Management Society⁶ was formed to address the seriously declining lake water level, water quality issues and decreased fish spawning habitat. The organization engages in active stewardship, raising awareness and understanding about the water issues at Muriel Lake, assisting with lake management and overall conservation of the local watershed.

6 <http://www.savemuriellake.com/>

PEACE- ATHABASCA DELTA

Located west of Fort Chipewyan in northeast Alberta

Latitude 58.653 | Longitude -111.813 | Size: 7,585 km²

Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations and threatened species

GEOGRAPHY

Alberta's largest IBA, the Peace-Athabasca Delta is a RAMSAR Wetland of Global Significance and is for the most part located within Wood Buffalo National Park, itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This large inland delta is a complex of lakes and wetlands that interact with the Peace, Athabasca and Slave rivers and their tributaries.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA supports bird populations from all four major North American flyways. Over 200 bird species have been identified here and thousands of ducks and geese migrate through every spring and fall. Species like Northern Pintails, Blue- and Green-winged Teals, Northern Shovelers and Canvasbacks all breed in

the IBA. The Northern Shovelers can be distinguished by their very large beaks, which they use to strain plankton from the water. The delta is also a breeding ground for the endangered Whooping Crane. This area contains critical spawning and nursery habitat for fish coming from Lake Claire and Lake Athabasca. Over 20 fish species are known to occur in the area including Lake Trout, Lake Whitefish, Arctic Grayling, Northern Pike and the nationally threatened Shortjaw Cisco.

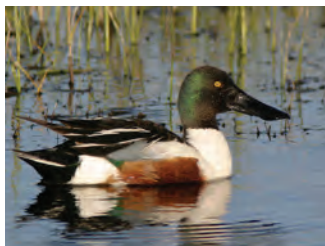
NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Peace-Athabasca Delta Ecological Monitoring Program (PADEMP) was established in 2008 in response to growing concerns about the cumulative impact of expanding regional development and climate change. PADEMP builds upon the work of previous cooperative programs and compliments existing regional monitoring efforts, including First Nations community-based monitoring programs to support effective environmental stewardship of this unique area⁷.

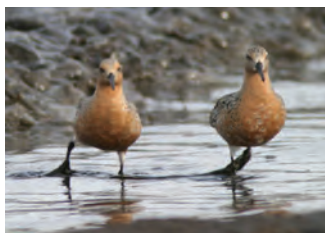
⁷ <http://www.pademp.com/>



Whooping Crane Photo: C. Artuso



Northern Shoveller Photo credit: C. Artuso



Red Knot Photo credit: C. Artuso



PELICAN LAKE

Located about 40 km from Wabasca in north-central Alberta

Latitude 55.8 | Longitude -113.256 | Size: 79 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

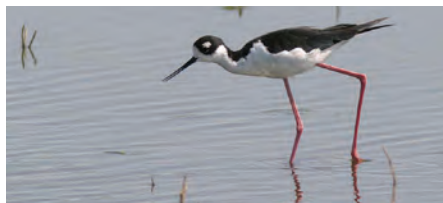
Pelican Lake is a remote lake located at the eastern end of the Wabasca Lakes chain, 21 km east of the Hamlet of Sandy Lake, in north-central Alberta. It is a permanent boreal lake that is surrounded by boggy wetlands. Although there is oil and gas activity in the area, there is no road access directly to the lake, so recreational activities are limited.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Relatively isolated, the area provides important nesting grounds to a globally significant American White Pelican population and a provincially significant Double-crested Cormorant population. Two islands within the lake host these breeding birds. Pelicans are highly sensitive to disturbances while breeding, and so tend to choose island nesting sites that are very isolated and safe from



American White Pelican



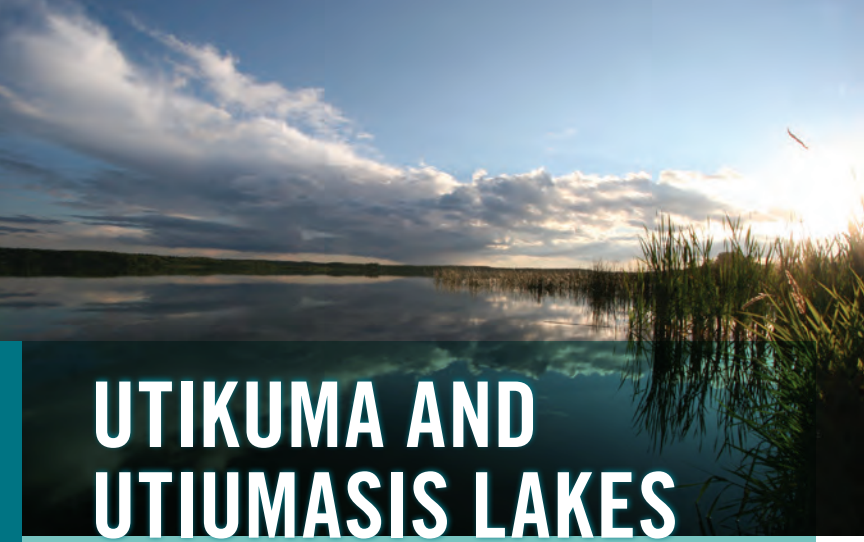
Black-necked Stilt

Photo: C. Artuso

predation by other birds and animals, such as gulls. California and Ring-billed Gulls also nest here in smaller numbers. Great Blue Herons have nested in the area in the past, but have not been found recently.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Breeding pelicans are sensitive to human disturbance. Excessive disturbance of birds results in exposure of eggs and young and consequently increased susceptibility to gull predation. There is considerable oil and gas exploration and development in the vicinity of the lake, although there is no road access or fishing of any kind.



UTIKUMA AND UTIUMASIS LAKES

Located 80 km northwest of the Town
of Slave Lake in north-central Alberta

Latitude 55.88 | Longitude -115.431 | Size: 746 km²

*Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations and
continentally significant for congregatory species*

GEOGRAPHY

Utikuma Lake is a large, extremely shallow lake with three islands and a maximum depth of 5.5 metres. Roughly 18% of its surface area is covered by emergent vegetation and it is subject to large algal blooms. The east side of the lake consists of a Sphagnum-dominated bog with an adjacent forested fen. The much smaller Utikumasis Lake, lies immediately west of and drains via a small river into Utikuma Lake which eventually drains into the Peace River via the Wabasca River.

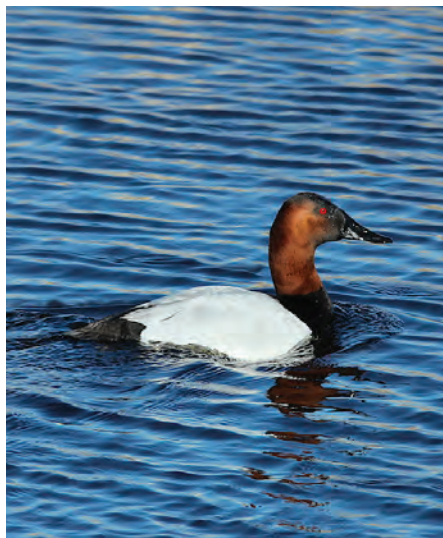
BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Both Utikuma and Utikumasis lakes attract globally significant numbers of waterfowl, especially during fall migration and the summer moult period. In July 2000, approximately 50,000 ducks

were seen on Utikuma alone. Some species are also often seen in high numbers. For example, Canvasbacks numbered about 40,000 birds in July and August, 1975, on Utikuma Lake. This represents about 6% of the global population. In the summer breeding season, male Canvasback ducks can be identified by their red eyes, reddish-brown heads and necks, black chests, and grey-brown bodies. The females are less elaborate, with brown heads, necks, and chests, and similar grey-brown on their bodies. Many species of colonial waterbirds nest on Utikuma Lake including Double-crested Cormorants, American White Pelican, Common Tern, Franklins Gull and Western Grebe.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

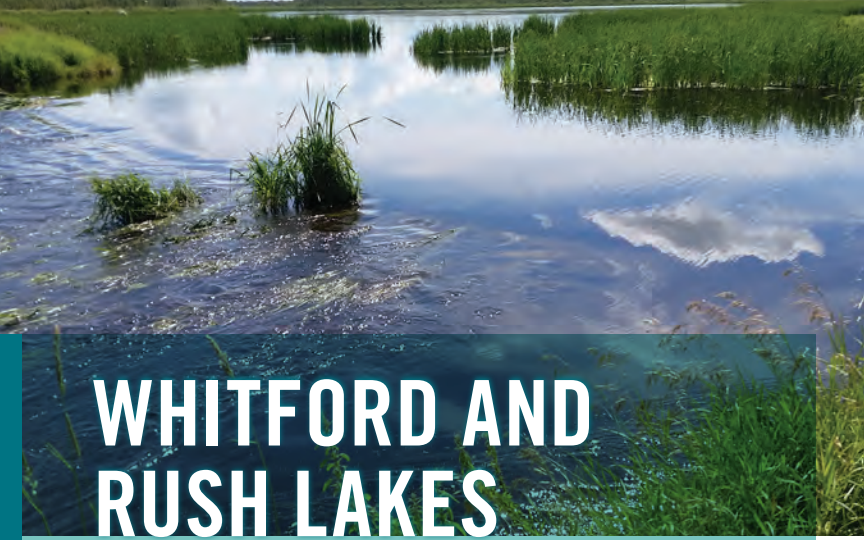
The name Utikuma is Cree for “big whitefish”. Utikuma Lake is managed for recreational, commercial and domestic fisheries, and Utikumasis Lake is also highly valued for local and sport fisheries. The water levels have been maintained and controlled since 1948 by a weir at the outlet that is maintained by Ducks Unlimited Canada.



Canvasback Photo: Price



Gulls Photo: G. Romanchuk



WHITFORD AND RUSH LAKES

Located 90 km from Edmonton in central Alberta

Latitude 53.846 | Longitude -112.249 | Size: 69 km²

Globally significant for waterfowl and shorebird concentrations; National significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

Whitford and Rush lakes are close to the railway community of Andrew, about 90 km northeast of Edmonton. Like many lakes in the prairies, these lakes are shallow and naturally subject to large fluctuations in water level.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Whitford and Rush Lakes have extensive emergent vegetation that is used by breeding birds. Most commonly spotted during spring migrations, many different species of shorebirds stage in the area, depending on water levels. Similarly, tens of thousands of water birds may pass through during fall migrations. Species include Western Grebes, Tundra Swans, Northern Pintails, Mallards, and Greater White-fronted Geese. One season saw over 90,000



Mallard Photo: D. Fairless



Ring-billed Gull

Photo: P. Jones

ducks on the lake. Forster's Terns, Eared and Western Grebes, and Black-crowned Night Herons have been known to breed in the area in smaller numbers. Adult Black-crowned Night Herons will often brood chicks that are not their own, an uncommon behaviour in most birds and other animals. They usually hunt at night and breed in colonies of often 10 or more nests.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Alberta Conservation Association maintains conservation sites on the south end of Whitford Lake⁸.

⁸ <http://www.albertadiscoverguide.com/site.cfm?grid=D3&number=82>

BOREAL CHECKLIST

✓	PAGE	IBA	DATE	OBSERVATIONS
	8	Cardinal Lake		
	10	Frank Lake North		
	12	Grande Prairie- Trumpeter Swan		
	14	Hay and Zama Lakes		
	16	Kimiwan Lake		
	18	Lac La Biche		
	20	Lakeland		
	22	Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park		
	24	Ministik, Joseph and Oliver Lakes		
	26	Miquelon Lake		

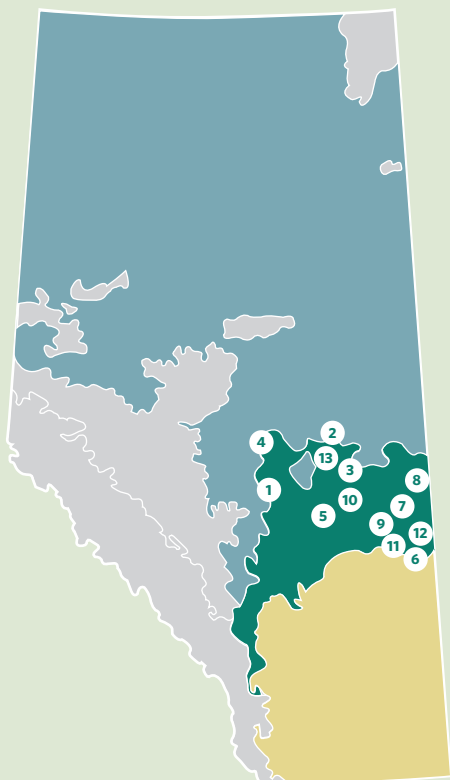


IBAs IN ALBERTA'S PARKLAND REGION

Covering between 10-15% of Alberta, the parkland region of Alberta is a transition area between the boreal and grassland regions. As such, the topography of this area can be highly variable, and ranges from dry, flat grasslands to hilly, forested areas to expansive marshlands.

Much of this region has been modified for agriculture and urban development, which is changing habitat and species compositions. However, this area still boasts hundreds of different species of shorebirds, waterfowl, songbirds and raptors.

Thirteen of Alberta's IBAs are located in this region, many of which overlap with Provincial Parks or other natural areas.



1. **BEARHILLS LAKE** | PAGE 42
2. **BEAVERHILL LAKE** | PAGE 44
3. **BELLSHILL LAKE** | PAGE 46
4. **BIG LAKE** | PAGE 48
5. **EWING AND ERSKINE LAKES** | PAGE 50
6. **GOOSEBERRY LAKE** | PAGE 52
7. **HANSMAN LAKE** | PAGE 54
8. **KILLARNEY, DILLBERRY AND LEANE LAKES** | PAGE 56
9. **METISKOW AND SUNKEN LAKES** | PAGE 58
10. **SHULTZ LAKE** | PAGE 60
11. **SOUNDING LAKE** | PAGE 62
12. **ST. LAWRENCE LAKE** | PAGE 64
13. **WAVY LAKE** | PAGE 66



BEARHILLS LAKE

Located 13 km west of Wetaskiwin in central Alberta

Latitude 53.927 | Longitude -113.617 | Size: 21 km²

Global significance: Waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

Bearhills Lake is a shallow lake with a maximum depth of 4.5 to 6 m and a small buffer of aspen around the perimeter. The site includes some grassland, shrub and sandhill areas in the surrounding uplands. The adjacent uplands are quite extensive since the basin for Bearhills Lake is one of the largest in the region. The majority of the shoreline areas consist of bulrushes and cattails.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA is important for staging and moulting ducks during fall migration. Often over 20,000 individuals are observed, but highs of over 100,000 have been recorded. Marsh birds, like Red-winged and Yellow-headed blackbirds nest in the vegetation along the shoreline.



Red-winged Blackbird Photo: D. Fairless

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Ducks Unlimited Canada considers the lake to be a critical moulting and staging area for waterfowl and have built a weir on Bigstone Creek to limit lake level fluctuations. There is limited recreation available within the IBA site, although there has been an increase in sub-division development, boating and other water activities in the area over the past few years.



BEAVERHILL LAKE

Located 8 km east of Tofield in central Alberta;
60 km southeast of Edmonton

Latitude 53.45 | Longitude -112.529 | Size: 208 km²

Globally, continentally and nationally significant for waterfowl, congregatory species, wading birds and shorebird concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

The Beaverhill Lake site includes the waters of Beaverhill Lake (13,900 ha) and the Beaverhill Natural Area (410 ha). The lake is strongly alkaline and shallow with a maximum depth of two to three metres. Water levels fluctuate annually in response to precipitation. The shoreline is variable and includes shallow mudflats, narrow sandy beaches, and areas of dense emergent vegetation. The adjacent Beaverhill Natural Area has flat to gently rolling open grasslands with a mix of aspen groves and willow stands. Outside of the Natural Area, habitats are comprised primarily of rangeland with some cultivated areas.

**Canada Jay**

Photo: S. Quon

**Mountain Bluebird**

Photo: S. Quon

**Swainson's Hawk**

Photo: S. Quon

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

In the spring, hundreds of thousands of geese pass through the area, including Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese. Sandhill Cranes can be found here in the springtime and have been reported in the area with numbers as high as 8,000 at a time. Tree Swallows, Mountain Bluebirds and House Wrens also nest here. The area hosts thousands of shorebirds during the summer, most notably Red-necked Phalaropes and Pectoral Sandpipers, with numbers as high as ten thousand. Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Sandpipers and American Avocets are also commonly spotted. Neotropical warblers utilize the willows and young aspen forest surrounding the lake. E-bird shows 229 species recorded for this IBA.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Beaverhill Lake is internationally recognized due in part to the area's historical importance as a waterfowl staging area and as host to hundreds of thousands of birds during spring and fall migrations. The Beaverhill Bird Observatory, located within the IBA, was established in 1984 to collect information about the birds that utilize this site⁹ and monitor landbird migration. Significant numbers (1,000 to 3,000) and diversity (39 to 50+ species) of landbird migrants are banded at the site each season. Some of the more common species included Yellow-rumped and Yellow Warbler. Beaverhill Lake is listed on the regional Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site¹⁰.

⁹ <http://www.beaverhillbirds.com/>

¹⁰ <https://www.whsrn.org/beaverhill-lake>



BELLSHILL LAKE

Located 24 km from Sedgewick in
east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.602 | Longitude -111.555 | Size: 28 km²

*Globally significant for large waterfowl
concentrations and congregatory species*

GEOGRAPHY

Bellshill Lake is located approximately 24 km southeast of the town of Sedgewick, in east-central Alberta. Also known as Goose Lake, this lake has a few patches of bulrush along its shoreline, but otherwise the shoreline is open. The north end of the lake is fairly shallow with the central and southern portions being a little deeper. A mixture of pasture and cultivated lands surround the lake. Most of the land contained in the IBA is undeveloped natural area.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

The area is known for its high fall migration numbers of Snow, Greater White-fronted, and Ross's Geese, numbering as high as 20,000 individuals in some years. Canada Geese may also be



Canada Goose Photo: S. Quon

present in the fall to feed. Ross's Geese arrive in the area earlier than Snow Geese, which make up the majority of the waterfowl numbers counted each year. Because of this, there may be higher numbers of Ross's Geese that use the area than originally thought, making the area even more significant for migratory waterfowl.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held. Bellshill Lake is too shallow to support high numbers of fish and the area lacks tourism facilities making recreational activities, other than hunting, uncommon.



BIG LAKE

Located on the west side of St. Albert
in central Alberta

Latitude 53.602 | Longitude -113.728 | Size: 30 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species
and waterfowl concentrations.*

GEOGRAPHY

This freshwater lake is a large body of water that supports extensive stands of emergent vegetation. During low water years mudflats are also present along the north shore. The south shore supports large stands of mature aspen, birch and White Spruce.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Nesting colonies of Eared Grebes, Black Terns and Franklin's Gulls are present during the spring breeding season. Dabbling and diving ducks can be seen on the water during the summer in large numbers, and in October thousands of Tundra Swans stop to rest here during migration. Common Loons, Double-crested Cormorants, American White Pelicans, Great Blue Herons and Ospreys are often present fishing in the lake. Double-crested

Cormorants are mostly black in colour, and are often found feeding near pelicans. They have the distinctive habit of standing with their wings spread wide open, allowing them to dry after diving to feed. American Avocets, Dowitchers and sandpipers have been reported during years when water levels are low.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES


Once called the Big Lake Natural Area, in 2005 this area was renamed the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park after Alberta's 15th Lieutenant Governor and avid naturalist, Lois Hole. Today, the Big Lake Environmental Support Society organizes regular birding trips to their shelter and viewing platform on the east end of the lake. Ducks Unlimited Canada, together with Alberta Conservation Association, Big Lake Environmental Support Society, Alberta Parks and the City of St. Albert support and maintain the John E. Poole Interpretive Boardwalk, which is located on the east end of the lake.



Great Blue Heron Photo: S. Quon



Eared Grebe Photo: S. Quon



EWING AND ERSKINE LAKES

Located 10 km from Stettler in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.25 | Longitude -112.883 | Size: 172 km²

Globally significant for large waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

The Ewing and Erskine Lakes IBA site is near Stettler, which is approximately 10 km east of Erskine Lake and 20 km southwest of Ewing Lake. The site also includes some smaller lakes including Grose and Postill lakes, and Shuckburgh Slough. The site consists of a series of discontinuous wetlands, and adjacent parkland and grassland within a largely cultivated landscape. Most of these wetlands have extensive emergent vegetation, mostly bulrushes.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This area is important as a staging site for ducks during their fall migration. Up to 20,000 ducks have been recorded in the area. Postill Lake is a good breeding area for diving ducks as it is fairly fresh with bulrush and cattail vegetation. In addition to ducks, a



Wilson's Snipe Photo: C. Artuso



Killdeer Photo: C. Artuso

small number of Canada Geese nest on Erskine Lake each year. The area is generally productive for a variety of marsh birds and is also important shorebird staging habitat.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Ducks Unlimited Canada considers both Ewing and Erskine Lakes to be critical moulting and staging wetlands for ducks. Alberta Fish and Wildlife have had a Crop Damage Control waterfowl feeding station at West Erskine Lake in the past. Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held. Ewing Lake tends to dry up regularly, which affects the habitat suitability for shorebirds and some waterfowl.

GOOSEBERRY LAKE

Located 12 km from Consort in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.119 | Longitude -110.741 | Size: 19 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species;
nationally significant for large shorebird
concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

One of Alberta's smaller IBAs, Gooseberry Lake is one of the few permanent saline lakes in Alberta. This lake sits at the northern limit of the grassland region. The surrounding landscape is characterized by fescue-dominated grasslands, with scattered Trembling Aspen groves and areas of scrub vegetation also being present.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Variable water levels make this area important for a variety of shorebirds. Thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes can be found during spring and fall migration periods. An estimate of 10,000 Red-necked Phalaropes in the fall of 1987 is notable. Sanderlings

and Semipalmated Sandpipers usually gather in large numbers during their spring migrations. About 2,500 Sanderlings were recorded during the spring of 1989; this amounted to almost 1.5 % of the North American population. Sanderlings can be distinguished from other sandpipers by their normally pale, nearly white, colour, except for a darker brown patch on the wings. During the breeding season the males have reddish heads and breasts. They can be seen running along the shores, where they feed on small invertebrates. A species at risk, Piping Plovers have nested in the area in small numbers in the past. Grassland bird species are also present in the habitats surrounding the lake; a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek has historically been located in the immediate vicinity of the lake.

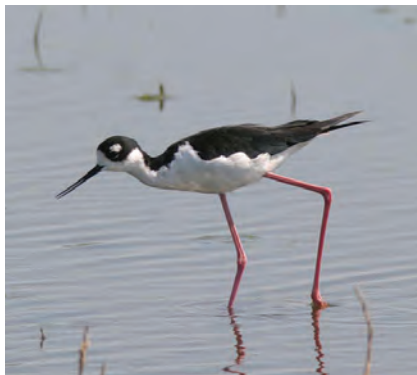
NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Although most of the area is privately held, the Gooseberry Lake Provincial Park, maintained by Alberta Parks¹¹, overlaps with a portion of the northwestern shore of the lake. Gooseberry Lake has been identified as part of a complex of lakes on the border region identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site because of its regional importance to shorebirds, and it has also been identified as critical moulting and staging wetland by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

¹¹ <https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/central/gooseberry-lake-pp/>



Spruce Grouse Photo: D. Fairless



Black-necked Stilt Photo: C. Artuso



HANSMAN LAKE

Located 10 km from Provost in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.392 | Longitude -110.405 | Size: 19 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

Hansman Lake is located approximately 10 km west of the town of Provost in east-central Alberta. The lake is fairly alkaline with no emergent vegetation. Most of the land around the lake is cultivated.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

The Hansman Lake IBA hosts tens of thousands of migrating geese in the fall. Most common are Snow Geese, however Ross's Geese can number as high as 5,000 in a season. Many of the Snow Geese present during the fall make their way to the area via the Central Flyway zone, known for its high numbers of waterfowl. Despite the abundance of certain species of waterfowl in the area, ducks and swans are rarely present on the lake. Piping Plovers have also nested here in the past.



Snow Geese

Ross's
Goose

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held.



KILLARNNEY, DILLBERRY AND LEANE LAKES

Located 26 km from Provost in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.578 | Longitude -110.061 | Size: 51 km²

Global significance: Congregatory species and shorebird concentrations; Continental significance: Congregatory species; National significance: Threatened species

GEOGRAPHY

Killarney, Dillberry and Leane lakes are a cluster of alkali lakes close to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The town of Provost, Alberta, is about 26 kilometres to the southwest of this IBA. The largest lake, Killarney Lake (4.4 km², 10 km of shoreline) is a shallow lake with 10 to 100 metre wide shorelines. Dillberry Lake, at half the size, has five (5) kilometres of mostly sandy and vegetated shoreline. The shorelines of the smaller Leane Lake include mudflats and gravelly beaches covered with alkali deposits.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

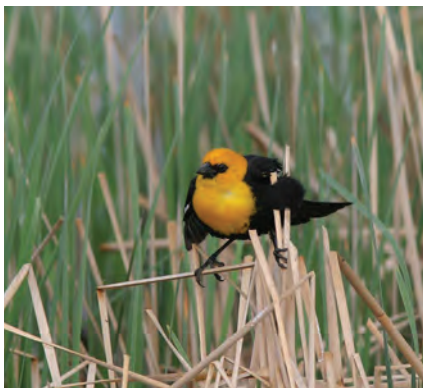
This area was designated an IBA because of the population of Piping Plovers that breed in the area in numbers that represent over 1% of the prairie population. Piping Plovers are stout shorebirds that may be found on sandy beaches. They have pale brown feathers on their wings and back, and white plumage on their undersides with black beaks. During breeding, the males have a distinctive black band around their necks, a black spot on their forehead, and their beak is mostly orange with a black tip. Spring migrations also bring thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes and other shorebirds, including Stilt Sandpipers to this IBA. Yellow-headed and Red-winged blackbirds may also be found in reeds next to the water. The nationally vulnerable Northern Leopard Frog used to be found here.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Designated as an IBA in 2008, the area is mostly located within Dillberry Lake Provincial Park, which is open to the public between May and September. The park was established in 1957 and offers several types of recreation. Killarney and Leane Lakes are part of a complex of lakes on the border region identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site because of their importance to an endangered species and migrating shorebirds.



Sora Photo: S.Quon



Yellow-headed Blackbird Photo: C. Artuso



METISKOW AND SUNKEN LAKES

Located 30 km from Provost in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.393 | Longitude -110.643 | Size: 27 km²

*Global significance: Congregatory species;
Continental significance: Shorebird concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

Metiskow and Sunken Lakes are two small shallow lakes in central eastern Alberta. Metiskow Lake is just north of the community of Metiskow, while Sunken Lake is to the south. The town of Provost is about 30 km to the east. These lakes are permanent hypersaline lakes surrounded by aspen parkland and some cultivated land.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

High numbers of migrating Baird's Sandpipers and Sanderlings can be found at this site, sometimes numbering into the thousands each spring. Other shorebirds that appear during spring migration include White-rumped Sandpiper and Semipalmated sandpipers. Both Piping Plover and Whooping Crane have also been recorded



Whooping Crane Photo: C. Artuso



White-crowned Sparrow Photo: S. Quon

in the area. Songbirds in the surrounding aspen forest include Hermit Thrushes, Lark Sparrows, Myrtle Warblers and Spotted Towhees. Scratch grass, a rare plant in Alberta, is found in this area, one of only a few locations province-wide.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Hypersaline lakes have a higher salt concentration than sea water, creating an inhospitable environment for many otherwise common aquatic organisms. Instead, hypersaline lakes often support unique microbial and crustacean life, which serves as an alternate food source for animals such as birds.



SHULTZ LAKE

Located 30 km from Sedgewick in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.494 | Longitude -111.653 | Size: 3 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

Alberta's smallest IBA, Shultz Lake is located approximately 30 km south of the town of Sedgewick, in east-central Alberta. This small, non-alkaline lake is fairly shallow with an abundance of submergent vegetation. Most of the surrounding lands are croplands.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Schultz Lake hosts significant numbers of geese during fall migration. Up to 25,000 geese have been counted at one time, although more typical numbers range between 10,000 and 20,000. This goose population consists primarily of Snow Geese, although Greater White-fronted and Canada Geese are also present. In the early 1900s, Snow Geese populations declined

to such an extent that hunting of them was banned. Today, they threaten their own survival due to their high numbers. They are so populous that their habitat may be unable to sustain the mass numbers that feed or nest in an area. In addition to the geese, thousands of ducks and small numbers of Tundra Swans can be seen during the fall. Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and eagles have also been seen passing through in the fall.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Most of the lands around the lake are privately held.



Northern Harrier Photo: C. Artuso



Rough-legged Hawk Photo: S. Quon

SOUNDING LAKE

Located 20 km from Consort in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.148 | Longitude -110.494 | Size: 77 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and large shorebird concentrations; nationally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

Sounding Lake, and Greenlee Lake to the north (which is part of the site), are alkali lakes that are dry in drought years. Habitat types include upland fescue grass communities interspersed with aspen groves. The lake is fed by Sounding Creek and drains into Eyehill Creek. Upland areas are important for White-tailed Deer and Mule Deer.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Sounding Lake water levels fluctuate widely from year to year, even drying up occasionally. Because of this, bird populations, such as the Piping Plover, often fluctuate with it. Piping Plovers prefer lower water levels so that they can nest on the shores, while

waterfowl are more likely to be found in large numbers during years with higher water levels. Typically this IBA hosts significant numbers of shorebirds during spring and fall migrations. Spring species include Baird's Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Stilt Sandpipers. Fall species include Lesser Yellowlegs.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

This area is relatively isolated with no direct roads leading to the lake. Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held.



Mixed flock of dowitchers, plovers and sandpipers Photo: C. Artuso



Baird's Sandpiper Photo: S. Quon



ST. LAWRENCE LAKE

Located 15 km from Provost in east-central Alberta

Latitude 52.346 | Longitude -110.026 | Size: 12 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

During the fall, globally significant numbers of Snow and Greater White-fronted Geese stage in the area, numbering as high as 30,000. Like many geese species, Greater White-fronted Geese mate for long periods of time. But in addition to mate pairings, family associations between parents and children, or siblings, can last for years between these birds, sometimes throughout the rest of their lives. Many other waterfowl also utilize the lake and surrounding area.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The lake is fairly isolated and so recreational activities are non-existent.



Mallard Photo: D. Fairless



Great Blue Heron Photo: S. Quon



WAVY LAKE

Located 11 km from Daysland in central Alberta

Latitude 52.871 | Longitude -112.07 | Size: 40 km²

Globally significant for waterfowl concentration

GEOGRAPHY

Wavy Lake is about 10 kilometres long and two to three kilometres wide.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Wavy Lake is important for the tens of thousands of ducks, Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese that can be found there during spring and fall migrations. Sandhill Cranes have also been seen during migration periods in smaller numbers. Sandhill Cranes can live for 20 years. They don't mate until they are a few years old, but once they do, mated pairs stay together all year round. They are distinguishable due to their large size, large wingspans, tufted feathers on their rumps, and red facial markings.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Most of the land surrounding this IBA is Crown land. Highway 13 is three kilometres to the south of the lake, providing well developed road access around the lake but there is poor access to the lakeshore itself. Ducks Unlimited Canada considers the lake a critical moulting and staging wetland, and has a restoration project in the area to preserve the wetlands surrounding the lake.



Red-breasted Merganser Photo: C. Artuso



Common Merganser Photo: D. Fairless

PARKLAND CHECKLIST

✓	PAGE	IBA	DATE	OBSERVATIONS
	42	Bearhills Lake		
	44	Beaverhill Lake		
	46	Bellshill Lake		
	48	Big Lake		
	50	Ewing and Erskine Lakes		
	52	Gooseberry Lake		
	54	Hansman Lake		
	56	Killarney, Dillberry and Leane Lakes		
	58	Metiskow and Sunken Lakes		

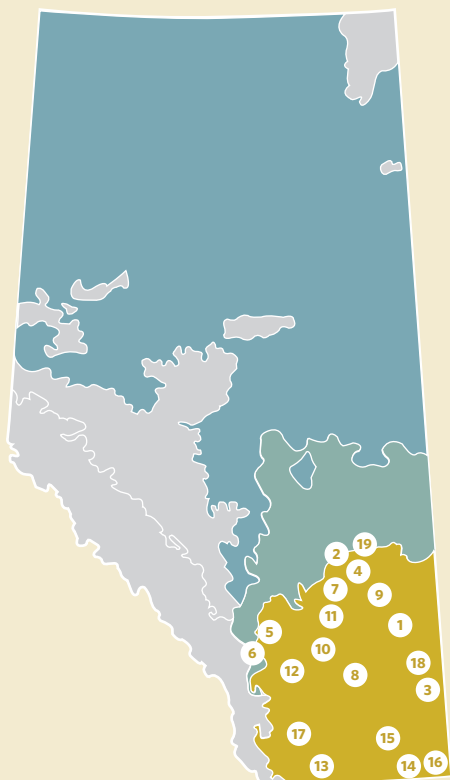


IBAs IN ALBERTA'S GRASSLAND REGION

Alberta's grassland region encompasses the southern part of the province, east of the Rocky Mountains. Comprised mostly of plains, rolling hills and badlands, it is considered the most at-risk natural region in Alberta, partially due to conversion of the land for agriculture and urban development.

Most of the vegetation, as the name of the region would imply, consists of grasses and some shrubs. The climate is the warmest and driest in the province. Many species found here are unique to this area or rare in other areas of the province. In fact, the grasslands region has the highest proportion of endangered species within Alberta. Some of the bird species at risk include Burrowing Owls, Sage Grouse and Ferruginous Hawks.

Alberta's grassland region is home to numerous small to medium-sized IBAs. This includes Alberta's smallest IBA – Shultz Lake which is just over three square kilometers – as well as a number of other prairie lakes and reservoirs.



1. **CAVENDISH RAIL LINE** | PAGE 72
2. **CHAIN LAKES** | PAGE 74
3. **CHAPPICE LAKE** | PAGE 76
4. **DOWLING LAKE** | PAGE 78
5. **EAGLE, NAMAKA AND STOBART LAKES** | PAGE 80
6. **FRANK LAKE SOUTH** | PAGE 82
7. **HANDHILLS LAKE** | PAGE 84
8. **HAYS RESERVOIR** | PAGE 86
9. **KIRKPATRICK AND FITZGERALD LAKES** | PAGE 88
10. **LAKE NEWELL AND KITSIM RESERVOIR** | PAGE 90
11. **LITTLE FISH LAKE** | PAGE 92
12. **MCGREGOR LAKE AND TRAVERS RESERVOIR** | PAGE 94
13. **MCINTYRE RANCH** | PAGE 96
14. **MILK RIVER CANYON AND AREA** | PAGE 98
15. **PAKOWKI LAKE** | PAGE 100
16. **SAGE CREEK** | PAGE 102
17. **ST. MARY RESERVOIR** | PAGE 104
18. **SUFFIELD** | PAGE 106
19. **SULLIVAN LAKE** | PAGE 108

CAVENDISH RAIL LINE

Located along the Canadian Pacific Railway line between Cavendish and Atlee in south-east Alberta

Latitude 50.0818 | Longitude -110.703 | Size: 111 km²

Nationally significant for threatened Loggerhead Shrike

GEOGRAPHY

The Cavendish Rail Line is a 36 km long by 1 km wide strip of land along the Canadian Pacific Railway and Secondary Highway 555 between the towns of Cavendish and Atlee, Alberta. The habitat consists of tall shrubs of mainly thorny buffalo-berry interspersed among the exotic grasses of the right-of-way. Surrounding this strip of habitat is native mixed grassland, interspersed with small amounts of cropland and non-native plant pasturelands.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This area hosts the densest population of breeding Loggerhead Shrikes in Alberta; around 2% of the Canadian population. Loggerhead Shrikes are medium sized songbirds with a distinctive



Upland Sandpiper Photo: C. Artuso



Swainson's Hawk Photo: C. Artuso

black mask across their eyes. Their undersides are white, and their wings and backs are usually a light grey-brown colour. They are also notable for the fact that, along with Northern Shrikes, they stand alone as predatory songbirds, actively hunting their prey which may consist of frogs, mice, or insects. They have recently been the subject of field breeding experiments in Ontario, where breeding pairs are moved to enclosed areas like zoos to breed and raise their young, and then released again once the young are old enough to embark on their own. While this species is nationally endangered, the specifics of their decline are not clearly known.

The native grassland areas adjacent to the rail line support a wide variety of mixed grassland species, including Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew (nationally vulnerable), Baird's Sparrow, and Sprague's Pipit (nationally threatened).

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Most of the land is not available for public use, so birding or other recreation activities are limited.



CHAIN LAKES

Located 20 to 40 km from Hanna in south-eastern Alberta

Latitude 51.846 | Longitude -112.233 | Size: 67 km²

*Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations;
nationally significant for threatened Piping Plovers*

GEOGRAPHY

The Chain, Spiers and Farrell lakes are located 20 to 40 kilometres northwest of Hanna, Alberta. They are a complex of shallow alkali lakes, some of which are ephemeral in nature. The surrounding landscape consists of grassy meadows, aspen parkland and alkali springs that feed small wetland areas. The Chain Lakes consists of a series of eight small wetlands extending in a line northwest from the Dowling Lake IBA. Each lake is numbered sequentially from east to west; the first and third lakes are named Pearl and Clear, while the others remain unnamed. Chain Lake #4 has 10 to 30 m wide beaches of alkali and gravel, while the beaches of Chain Lake #6 are wider, and are composed of firm gravel and sand with only small quantities of alkali beach. Spiers Lake, about 5 km to the north, is a freshwater lake with a narrow gravel bar and a shoreline

that is mostly vegetated. Farrell Lake is located immediately to the west. This lake contains mudflats that are attractive to migrant shorebirds.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA designation comes from the area's breeding Piping Plover population, as well as the many thousands of waterfowl found during fall migration. Baird's Sparrows and Sprague's Pipits also breed in the area in smaller numbers. E-bird shows 61 species have been recorded at this IBA. Male Sprague's Pipits display to females by flying in the air, sometimes for upwards of half an hour. Baird's Sparrows often run to evade predators or other threats rather than fly away. They are notoriously hard to spot due to their low-lying behavior on the ground, and are heard more often than they are seen. Large numbers of geese utilize these wetlands and lakes during fall migration, with greater than 15,000 recorded in the 1980s at Spiers Lake, and over 5,000 recorded at Farrell Lake. In the summer, both Baird's Sparrows and Sprague's Pipits breed in the grasslands surrounding the lake.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Outside of Chain Lakes Provincial Park, most of the land within the IBA is privately held, so opportunities for birding are not readily available.



Le Conte's Sparrow Photo: C. Artuso



Solitary Sandpiper Photo: C. Artuso

CHAPPICE LAKE

Located 20 km northeast of Medicine Hat in southeastern Alberta

Latitude 50.165 | Longitude -110.359 | Size: 17 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species;
nationally significant for large shorebird
concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA includes the lake and a one kilometre buffer of grasslands. Chappice Lake is a permanent saline lake, with a shoreline of 7.2 km, surrounded by native mixed grassland. The shorelines are often soft and muddy, and there are extensive alkali deposits. There are saline springs and seepages in excellent condition.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Chappice Lake hosts a wide diversity of birds throughout the summer and winter, including many endangered or threatened species. The IBA designation is primarily due to the high number of migratory shorebirds that frequent the area, including Baird's

Sandpipers, Willets, American Avocets, and Wilson's Phalaropes. In addition to this, the area is very important for grassland birds such as the Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, and Sprague's Pipit. E-bird shows 75 species for this IBA.

Unlike many other owl species, Burrowing Owls are active during the day. They are small, slightly larger than a robin, and make their nests in pre-existing burrows on the ground left empty by small animals such as prairie dogs.

Scratch grass, a rare plant in Alberta, occurs at Chappice Lake. This is one of only a few (approximately 6-20) occurrences in the province. This grassland IBA also supports healthy populations of Richardson's Ground Squirrels.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

This site has limited access due to private land ownership.



Ferruginous Hawk Photo: S. Gordon



American Avocet Photo: C. Artuso



DOWLING LAKE

Located 8 km from Hanna in southern Alberta

Latitude 51.733 | Longitude -112.02 | Size: 65 km²

*Continently significant for congregatory species;
nationally significant for threatened Piping Plovers*

GEOGRAPHY

Wetland complexes, consisting of ephemeral marshes, wet meadows and alkali marshes surround this large alkali lake. Dowling Lake is fed by Wolf Creek and by alkaline springs, but there is no outflow from the lake. The substrate along the shoreline consists of gravel and mud.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Threatened Piping Plovers occur in nationally significant numbers in the area. This IBA also hosts a range of colonial waterfowl during the breeding season, including Double-crested Cormorants, Common Terns, and Great Blue Herons. Common Terns can be seen diving from the air at high speeds into the water to feed, hunting small fish rather than dabbling. Large numbers of geese use the area for staging during the fall. E-bird shows records for 100 species at this IBA.



Bluewinged Teal Photo: G. Court



Piping Plover Photo: G. Romanchuk

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Lands around the lake are privately held.



EAGLE, NAMAKA AND STOBART LAKES

Located 7 km southeast of Strathmore in south-central Alberta

Latitude 50.964 | Longitude -113.275 | Size: 86 km²

Globally, continentally and nationally significant for congregatory species and waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

Eagle Lake is the largest of four lakes in this IBA and is surrounded mainly by agricultural land, some country residential development along the northwest shore, and a small recreational area on the east shore. Stobart Lake, which is immediately southeast of Namaka Lake, is the most natural of the three lakes and has extensive development of nearshore and offshore emergents such as cattails and bulrushes. There is a small recreational area located along the east shore. The site also includes Ballina Lake, which is a small Ducks Unlimited wetland project located between Namaka and Stobart lakes.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

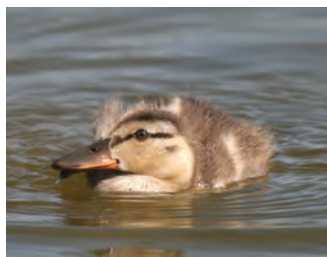
Ducks and Tundra Swans are found at this IBA during the fall

migration period. Red-necked Phalaropes and Western Grebes can be found during their spring migrations in smaller numbers, and Wilson's Phalaropes use the area to stage in the fall. Wilson's Phalaropes can be distinguished from Red-necked Phalaropes by the time of year they can be found in the area, but also by their markings. While breeding, female Red-necked Phalaropes have a black head with large, white spots on both sides, and a bright red neck. The female Wilson's Phalaropes, present during the fall when the birds are out of the breeding season, have much more muted colour, being mostly white on the underside with mottled grey or brown on their backs.

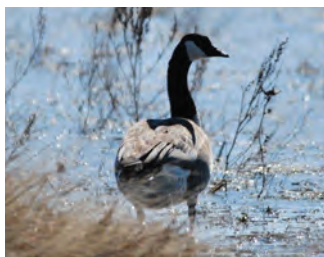
Smaller populations of shore birds inhabit the area during the fall, and Bald Eagles can be seen over the winter months.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

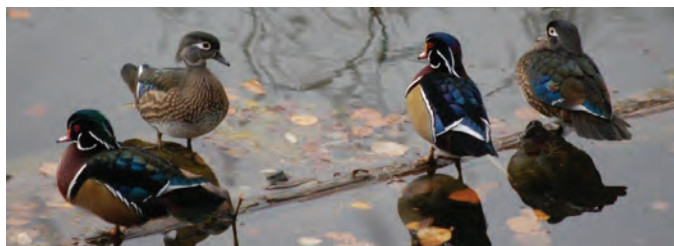
The TransCanada highway runs east-west 1.6 km north of Eagle Lake, although road access to most of the lakes is limited.



Mallard young Photo: D. Fairless



Canada Goose Photo: S. Quon



Wood Duck Photo: S. Quon



FRANK LAKE SOUTH

Located 6 km east of High River in southern Alberta

Latitude 50.546 | Longitude -113.707 | Size: 44 km²

Globally, continentally and nationally significant for congregatory specie and large waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

Frank Lake is a shallow lake bordered by marshes and low-lying meadows, although some of the shoreline is non-vegetated. Much of the surrounding landscape has been cultivated, although some native grassland remains.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Frank Lake South IBA is considered the most important wetland in southern Alberta for breeding water birds. Frank Lake contains a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds during spring and fall migrations. Species present in the area include Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, Northern Pintails, Baird's Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Eared Grebes, and Marbled Godwits. Marbled

Godwits, a larger shorebird, can be distinguished by their extremely long bills, which are slightly upturned and black at the tip. Although previously uncommon, Black-necked Stilts have been increasing in this area. These shorebirds have incredibly long red legs, black and white feathers, and thin, sharply pointed black beaks.

There are also multiple threatened or endangered species that breed in the area, including, Loggerhead Shrikes, Short-eared Owls, Ferruginous Hawks, and Long-billed Curlews. Franklin's Gulls also breed in the area, with recorded numbers as high as 10,000 individuals in past years.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Frank Lake has a long history of fluctuating water levels. Since the 1970s, Ducks Unlimited Canada has acquired land on the west and northeast shores and has been managing the area by controlling water flow using treated wastewater from a meat packing plant and the Town of High River. The grassland portion of this site is managed for grassland species of both tall dense cover and of shorter grassland habitats. Many artificial structures, including nest boxes, nest platforms, and rock islands, have been placed in Frank Lake to enhance breeding bird habitat. E-bird shows 211 species recorded for this IBA.



Short-billed Dowitchers Photo: C. Artuso



Short-eared Owl Photo: C. Artuso



HANDHILLS LAKE

Located 21 km from Hanna in southern Alberta

Latitude 51.49 | Longitude -112.127 | Size: 13 km²

*Continently significant for congregatory species;
nationally significant for threatened Piping Plovers*

GEOGRAPHY

Handhills Lake has almost 18 km of shoreline with large, extensive mudflats, alkali flats, sand beaches, and pebble shorelines. The lake is fed by alkali springs and a number of small, intermittent channels, but there is no drainage out of the lake.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA has been designated for its Piping Plovers (between 21 and 77 birds, approximately 1% of the Northern Great Plains population). Piping Plover populations are decreasing. In an attempt to combat the effects of disturbance, predator fencing around key plover nesting areas is helping to protect them.

Additionally, thousands of staging ducks, geese and shorebirds are present during the fall. E-bird shows records for more than 100 species at this IBA including a number of songbirds.



Piping Plover Photo: G. Court



Western Meadowlark

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Lands around the lake are privately held.



HAYS RESERVOIR

Located halfway between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat in southeastern Alberta

Latitude 50.062 | Longitude -111.832 | Size: 9 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

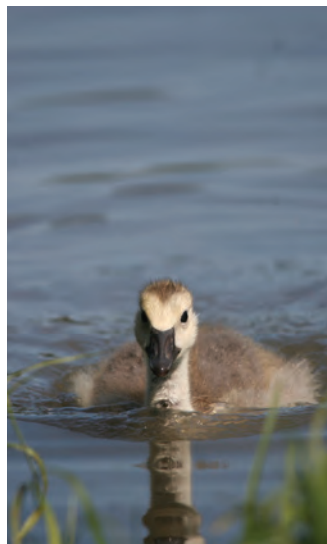
Hays Reservoir is an artificial reservoir with five small islands that are used by colonial nesting birds. The reservoir contains little marsh development, but it is surrounded by native mixed grassland habitat. An irrigation canal feeds the reservoir.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

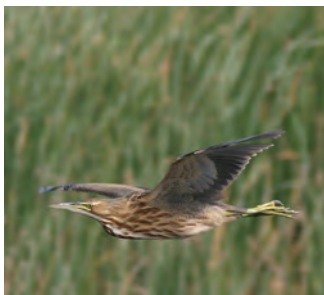
This IBA is most notable for its extremely high numbers of American White Pelicans during the breeding season, representing about 4% of the global population. This colony is the largest in Alberta. In addition to pelicans, the area also hosts large numbers of breeding Ring-billed and California Gulls, Caspian Terns, and Double-crested Cormorants. Diving and dabbling ducks, as well as geese, use the area while moulting and staging, although in smaller numbers than the above species. The nationally vulnerable Great Plains Toad was reported breeding at this site in 1982.



American White Pelican Photo: D. Fairless



Canada Goose Photo: D. Fairless



American Bittern

KIRKPATRICK AND FITZGERALD LAKES

Located 29 km from Veteran in east-central Alberta

Latitude 51.848 | Longitude -111.207 | Size: 243 km²

Globally significant for large waterfowl concentrations

GEOGRAPHY

This large but shallow saline lake is surrounded by a mix of native grassland and cultivated fields.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA is significant for the number of waterfowl that pass through during fall migration, numbering in the tens of thousands each season. The area also serves as a breeding ground for many other bird species, including Baird's Sparrows, Loggerhead Shrikes, Sprague's Pipits, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Upland Sandpipers.

Diving and dabbling ducks can be distinguished by watching them feed on the water. Dabbling ducks, such as Mallards, dip their heads in the water and stick their tails in the air. Diving ducks, such

as the Canvasback, sit lower in the water and dive for food. Their legs are also located further back on their bodies, towards their tails, making walking on land more difficult than it is for dabblers.



Sharp-tailed Grouse Photo: G. Romanchuk



Ring-billed Gulls Photo: C. Artuso

LAKE NEWELL AND KITSIM RESERVOIR

Located 7 km from Brooks, Alberta

Latitude 50.417 | Long. -111.937 | Size: 114 km²

*Nationally significant for congregatory species
and colonial waterbird concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA includes Lake Newell, Kitsim Reservoir, Little Rolling Hills Reservoir, Kinbrook Island Provincial Park and some gently rolling uplands. Lake Newell is a large, mildly eutrophic reservoir with extensive marsh habitat and a number of small to medium sized islands, most of which are included in Kinbrook Island Provincial Park. Aside from a small amount of natural drainage, the lake is fed via the Bassano Dam diversion (from the Bow River) and drains into Bantry Canal or Little Rolling Hills Reservoir. Kitsim Reservoir (about a third of the size) lies just to the west.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

American White Pelicans breed here and can be found throughout the summer. The area also serves as breeding grounds for many other birds. Species to note are the endangered Burrowing Owls,



Burrowing Owl Photo: C. Artuso

Long-billed Curlews, California and Ring-billed Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, and Black-bellied Plovers.

The largest of the North American Plovers, male Black-bellied Plovers have a distinctive black underside that ranges from the belly all the way to the underside of their bills during the breeding season. When flying, the black colouring can be seen even under their wings, sometimes described as a black armpit. They are speckled black, grey, and white on their backs and wings, and have a white tail. They are also the only Plover that has a hind toe on the back of their foot, although it is hard to see.

This site is significant for a population of Great Plains Toad (red-listed in Alberta) and is also possibly the only site in Canada for Water Hyssop and one of only three known Alberta locations for Slender Mouse-ear Cress.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The Eastern Irrigation District owns a majority of the land around these waterbodies. Access to Pelican Island is prohibited at certain times during the year to protect colonial bird nesting sites. Kinbrook Island Provincial Park, on the east side of Lake Newell, is managed by Alberta Environment and Parks for recreational use. The Kinbrook Marsh wetlands near the campground provide excellent bird watching and wildlife viewing on an interpretive marsh trail.



LITTLE FISH LAKE

Located 34 km southeast of Drumheller in southern Alberta

Latitude 51.392 | Longitude -112.269 | Size: 36 km²

Nationally significant for threatened Piping Plovers

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA includes Little Fish Lake itself, the Little Fish Lake Provincial Park on the east side of the lake and the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve on the northwest. This small lake is shallow, alkaline, slightly saline and very productive. The 14 km shoreline contains extensive gravel beaches with alkali deposits that are between 10 and 30 m wide. The Hand Hills are an unusual feature in Alberta they are a remnant Tertiary plateau that rises 146 m above the surrounding area. Extensive areas of relatively undisturbed northern rough fescue grassland are found here.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

The area's IBA status comes from the historical use of the shorelines by Piping Plovers as breeding grounds. Other species at risk that breed in the area include Ferruginous Hawks, Loggerhead

Shrikes, Long-billed Curlews, and Sprague's Pipits. Fall migration brings thousands of geese to the lake. E-bird shows records of 89 species at this IBA.

Three rare plants grow in the Little Fish Lake area; they include Crowfoot Violet, Few-flowered Rush and Small Yellow Evening Primrose.

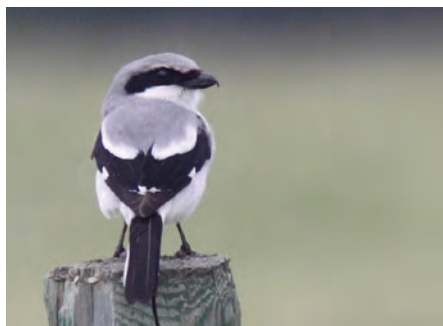
NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Both the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve and the provincial park are maintained by Alberta Environment and Parks¹¹.

¹¹ <https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/central/hand-hills-er/>



Long-billed curlew Photo: J. Landry-DeBoer



Loggerhead Shrike

MCGREGOR LAKE AND TRAVERS RESERVOIR

Located 27 km east of Vulcan in southern Alberta

Latitude 50.314 | Longitude -112.821 | Size: 251 km²

Nationally significant for congregatory species

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA includes McGregor Lake, Travers Reservoir, Little Bow Lake Reservoir and Little Bow Provincial Park. All three bodies of water are reservoirs and form part of the Carseland-Bow River Headworks System; McGregor Lake is part of the Oldman River drainage basin and was created in 1920 by two dams bracketing Snake Lake. None of the lakes have extensive marshy areas but there are mudflats at the north end of McGregor Lake. Native mixed grasslands, badlands, and eroding coulees surround the reservoirs.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

The area serves as a breeding ground for numerous species, including California Gulls and small numbers of Double-crested Cormorants. Small numbers of at-risk grasslands species such as breeding Burrowing Owls, Ferruginous Hawks, Long-billed Curlews, and Golden Eagles have also been spotted in the area.



American Avocet



Golden Eagle

Ducks and shorebirds stage in the area in the thousands during spring and fall migrations. There is also a large population of non-breeding American White Pelicans that stage during the summer, representing approximately 1% of the Canadian population.

The Low Milk Vetch, a rare plant in Alberta, is found at the site as are Mule deer and White-tailed deer.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

These reservoirs are primarily used for supplying water to surrounding areas and for fishing; the surrounding lands are mainly rangeland. McGregor Lake supports a substantial commercial fishery and a sport fishery; the maintenance of these fish species may be important for the pelicans that summer here.



MCINTYRE RANCH

Located 13 km north of the US border and
16 km south of the town of Magrath, Alberta

Latitude 49.203 | Longitude -112.853 | Size: 226.91 km²

Significant presence of Long-billed Curlews

GEOGRAPHY

The undulating topography of the ranch contains the western end of the Milk River Ridge. While Rough Fescue grassland is the dominant vegetation type of the ranch, several mixed grassland types are found on drier sites. Wetlands occur in the form of three lakes (Ross, Reed, and Anderson), ponds, ephemeral pools, marshes and two discontinuous streams. Many salt-loving plants are found in wetlands, although only two sloughs are considered fully saline. A thorough survey of the property revealed 366 plant taxa, of which 90% were native, and 14 were rare in Alberta. In places, eroding sandstone outcrops and shrubby coulees provide further habitats for birds.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

McIntyre Ranch has a rich diversity of grassland birds. With only a few thousand Long-billed Curlews remaining in Canada,

the presence of 50 or more at the McIntyre Ranch is significant, and represents about 1% of the Canadian population of this species. Numerous other grassland specialists, for example Baird's Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, Sprague's Pipit (nationally threatened), and Short-eared Owl (nationally vulnerable), are found here. Two nests of the nationally vulnerable Ferruginous Hawk have also been recorded here, along with nesting Prairie Falcons. Sharp-tailed Grouse are quite common in the area.

The lakes and wetlands support a variety of water birds. A large colony of Eared Grebes nests on Anderson Lake, while smaller numbers of California Gulls, Ring-billed Gulls, Common Terns and American Avocets nest at Ross Lake. Mallards, Northern Shovelers, Lesser Scaup and Ruddy Ducks are all abundant breeding ducks in the lakes and ponds. During the summer, several thousand geese use Ross Lake as a moulting area.

The bird diversity of the ranch is increased by the presence of coulees. Within the rocky outcrops, Rock Wrens and Common Ravens can be found, and in the shrubbier coulees, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, Yellow Warblers and both Western and Eastern Kingbirds breed alongside numerous other species. In total, 133 species of bird have been observed on the McIntyre Ranch.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

A working ranch, McIntyre Ranch consists of privately held land that is believed to contain the largest undisturbed fescue grassland on the North American continent.



Rock Wren Photo: Price



MILK RIVER CANYON AND AREA

Located in southeastern Alberta where it
borders the state of Montana

Latitude 49.077 | Longitude -110.835 | Size: 335.10 km²

*Supports populations of at least 7 nationally
vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species*

GEOGRAPHY

Three parallel drainage systems are contained within this site: the Milk River in the middle, Kennedy Coulee to the southwest, and the Lost River Valley to the northeast. These drainage systems and intervening plains support a diversity of habitats including native grasslands, badlands, coulees, riparian cottonwood groves, sagebrush flats, sand dunes, cliffs and rocky outcrops. Some of the land, especially in Kennedy Coulee is gently undulating, while other sections have more sharply eroded valley sides.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA supports breeding populations of at least seven nationally vulnerable, threatened, or endangered species, including the nationally endangered Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, and



Sprague's Pipit Photo: R. Fisher



Prairie Rattlesnake

Sage Grouse (prairie population); the nationally threatened Loggerhead Shrike (prairie population) and Sprague's Pipit; and the nationally vulnerable Long-billed Curlew, and Ferruginous Hawk. This is also one of the few locations in Canada where Mountain Plovers, a globally vulnerable species, are found.

The site also supports a significant community of prairie and grassland birds including Prairie Falcon, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Lark Bunting, Baird's Sparrow, McCown's Longspur, and Chestnut-collared Longspur. As many as 13 Prairie Falcon nesting sites have been noted, although not every site is used every year. Also, Common Poorwill are rare but regular at the site.

Numerous other rare flora or fauna are present including at least 11 plants that are rare in Canada, the nationally vulnerable Eastern Short-horned Lizard, and the nationally endangered Swift Fox.

The Milk River Basin supports a large proportion of Alberta's Pronghorn Antelope population, the Plains Hognose Snake and Bullsnares, along with the Prairie Rattlesnake, Northern Leopard Frog and several rare fish and invertebrates.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Large parts of this site occur within the Kennedy Coulee Ecological Reserve¹² and the Milk River Natural Area¹³. The Lost River Sensitive Area was a release site for the reintroduction of the Swift Fox.

¹² <https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/south/kennedy-coulee-er/>

¹³ <https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/south/milk-river-na/>



PAKOWKI LAKE

Located 25 km east-southeast from
Foremost in southern Alberta

Latitude 49.323 | Longitude -110.949 | Size: 276 km²

*Globally and nationally significant for congregatory
species, waterfowl and shorebird concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

Pakowki Lake is an intermittent freshwater lake and sand dune-wetland complex. There are extensive bulrush marshes and areas of open water. The only inflow channel is the Etzikom Coulee, which is an impressive glacial spillway channel; the lake has no outflows, except for under extremely high water levels where a channel south to the Milk River would allow for outflow. The surrounding uplands are predominantly mixed-grass prairie.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA is significant for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, most notably ducks, Stilt Sandpipers, American Avocets, Wilson's Phalaropes and Dowitchers. Pakowki Lake is also important as a breeding ground for many other bird species, including White-



Killdeer Photo: S. Quon



Greater Yellowlegs Photo: S. Quon

headed Ibis, Great Blue Herons, and Ring-billed and California Gulls. E-bird reports 180 species recorded at this IBA.

In addition to the many bird species found here, the Pakowki Lake area is also home to Pronghorn Antelope, the Plains Hognose Snake, and two at-risk plant species, the Smooth Goosefoot and Western Spiderwort.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Road access surrounds the lake but actual access to the shore is limited. Most of the surrounding land is used for agriculture and much is privately held so recreational activities are limited. Despite this, part of the lake has been designated a Provincial Bird Sanctuary¹⁴ allowing birders to enjoy the large diversity supported here.

¹⁴ <https://www.travelalberta.com/ca/listings/pakowki-lake-bird-sanctuary-4504/>

SAGE CREEK

Located in the extreme southeastern portion of Alberta, bordering Saskatchewan and Montana, approximately 90 km south of Medicine Hat

Latitude 49.250 | Longitude 110.371 | Size: 3,005.48 km²

Significant for its important habitat for species at risk

GEOGRAPHY

This IBA is at the western extremity of part of the largest block of mixed grassland remaining in Canada. Within this large site are areas of extensive mixed grassland, ephemeral saline wetlands, numerous streams and streamside shrubs, as well as small areas of badland habitats.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Sage Creek is a biodiversity hotspot in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta. The IBAs extensive grasslands are important habitat for numerous species of birds at risk in Canada, including the nationally endangered prairie population of the Greater Sage Grouse. The site is considered the centre of the currently shrinking range of this nationally endangered species.



Burrowing Owls Photo: C. Artuso

Another nationally endangered species, the Mountain Plover, breeds here. The Burrowing Owl, Long-billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, Sprague's Pipit and Loggerhead Shrike also nest in the area. Other uncommon species found here during the summer include Sharp-tailed Grouse, Bobolink and Baird's Sparrow.

Sage Creek IBA includes important habitat for Mule Deer and Pronghorn Antelope, and contains several release sites for the nationally endangered Swift Fox. At least five species of rare plants, including Flowering Quillwort, Plains Boisduvalii and Runcinate-leaved Rush-pink, are also found at this site.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

Although there are a few pockets of privately held land, the majority of the area remaining within this region is public land, which is tenured to a variety of leaseholders. Some of the leaseholders, notably those with larger tenures, have a long history of conserving the native grasslands within their leases by implementing ecologically-based grazing methods. In recent years, some holdings have been purchased by private individuals with the specific intent of protecting grasslands biodiversity under conservation easements¹⁵.

¹⁵ <https://albertawilderness.ca/issues/wildlands/areas-of-concern/milk-river-sage-creek/>



ST. MARY RESERVOIR

Located 45 km southwest of Lethbridge in
southern Alberta

Latitude 49.326 | Longitude -113.195 | Size: 63 km²

*Globally and nationally significant for congregatory
species*

GEOGRAPHY

The St. Mary Reservoir was created in 1951 by damming of the St. Mary River. The reservoir itself is a large water storage area (19 km by 8 km at its widest) within the St. Mary River valley. When the reservoir level drops by its mean annual drawdown of 6.7 metres, 46% of the reservoir area is exposed as mudflats. There are also five permanent islands near the upstream end, and other islands appear as the water level drops. Aside from the reservoir itself, there is some natural short-grass prairie and agricultural lands in the surrounding area. The terrain around the reservoir is mostly gently undulating to flat.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

This IBA is most notable for the California Gulls that breed here, along with Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls. Almost identical while breeding, you can tell Ring-billed Gulls from California Gulls by the red ring around their eyes, and their red gape. They also have a black ring around their beaks, which is easier to use for field identifications. California Gulls have orange orbital rings, and red and black spots located close together on their beaks.

Common Terns and Eared Grebes use the area in the summer but usually do not breed in the area. Significant populations of American White Pelicans have been recorded nesting here, as well as small numbers of Piping Plovers.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

The St. Mary Reservoir Provincial Recreation Area offers recreation activities in the area¹⁶.

¹⁶ <https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/south/st-mary-reservoir-pra/>



Common Loon Photo: D. Fairless



Greater Scaup Photo: D. Fairless

SUFFIELD

Located along the southeastern edge of Alberta
just north of Medicine Hat

Latitude 50.465 | Longitude 110.533 | Size: 460.71 km²

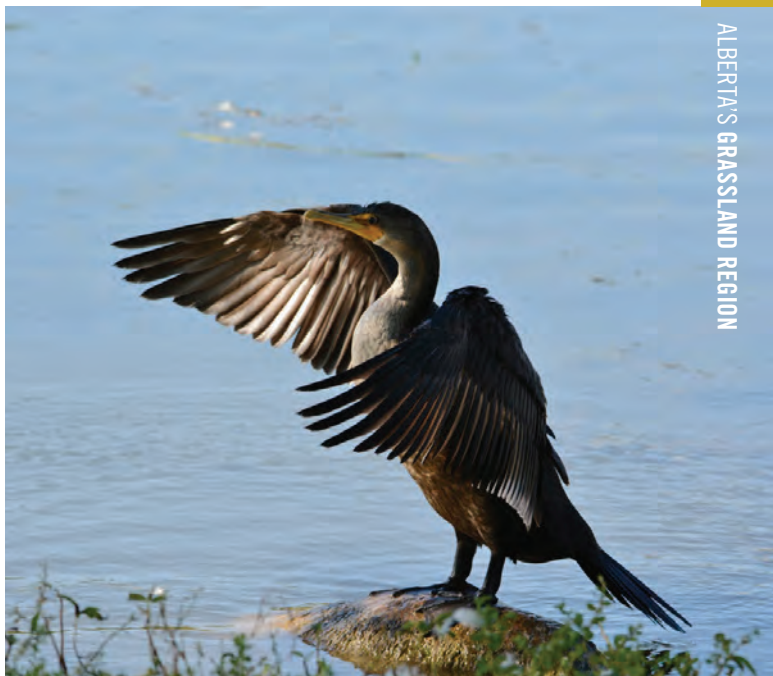
National Wildlife Area

GEOGRAPHY

Two sections of the Suffield Military Range bordering the South Saskatchewan River have been identified as large, high quality remnants of mixed grassland and sand hills. There are also intermittent saline lakes and springs in the area. The topography here is flat to gently rolling.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Four species of birds which have been designated as nationally threatened species breed in this area including Burrowing Owl (endangered), Loggerhead Shrike (prairie population, threatened, detected at 2.2% of 833 survey plots), Long-billed Curlew (vulnerable, 68 sightings in 1994-95), and Ferruginous Hawk (vulnerable).



Double Crested Cormorant Photo: L. Pettitt

This area contains a representative population of all grassland species (except Sage Grouse) and most are more abundant than in the general landscape for instance there are numerous Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing grounds. Grassland species with substantial breeding populations include McCown's Longspur, Brewer's Sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, Baird's Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Grasshopper Sparrow and Western Meadowlark. The South Saskatchewan River Valley contains high concentrations of Golden Eagle nesting sites. Prairie falcons are also found here.

The river valley is a major wintering area for Mule Deer and Pronghorn Antelope. The nationally vulnerable Ord's Kangaroo Rat and Eastern Short-Horned Lizard occur here, as does the Western Hog-nosed Snake and Prairie Rattlesnake.



SULLIVAN LAKE

Located 27 km from Castor in southern Alberta

Latitude 52.01 | Longitude -111.984 | Size: 221 km²

*Globally significant for congregatory species;
nationally significant for large waterfowl and
shorebird concentrations*

GEOGRAPHY

Sullivan Lake is a large, shallow lake with fluctuating water levels.

BIRDS AND BIODIVERSITY

Sullivan Lake is a critical staging and breeding ground for many waterfowl and shorebirds. During the spring, Baird's, Semipalmated and Stilt sandpipers can be found staging during migration. Semipalmated Sandpipers are one of only two sandpipers that have webbing between their toes, hence the name "palmated". They are also thought to travel between southern Canada and South America, a distance of approximately 2,500 miles, without stopping.

Thousands of waterfowl stage during their fall migrations, and the area also serves as breeding ground for smaller numbers of Baird's Sparrows, Sprague's Pipits, and Ferruginous Hawks.



Baird's Sparrow Photo: C. Artuso



Black-necked Stilt Photo: C. Artuso

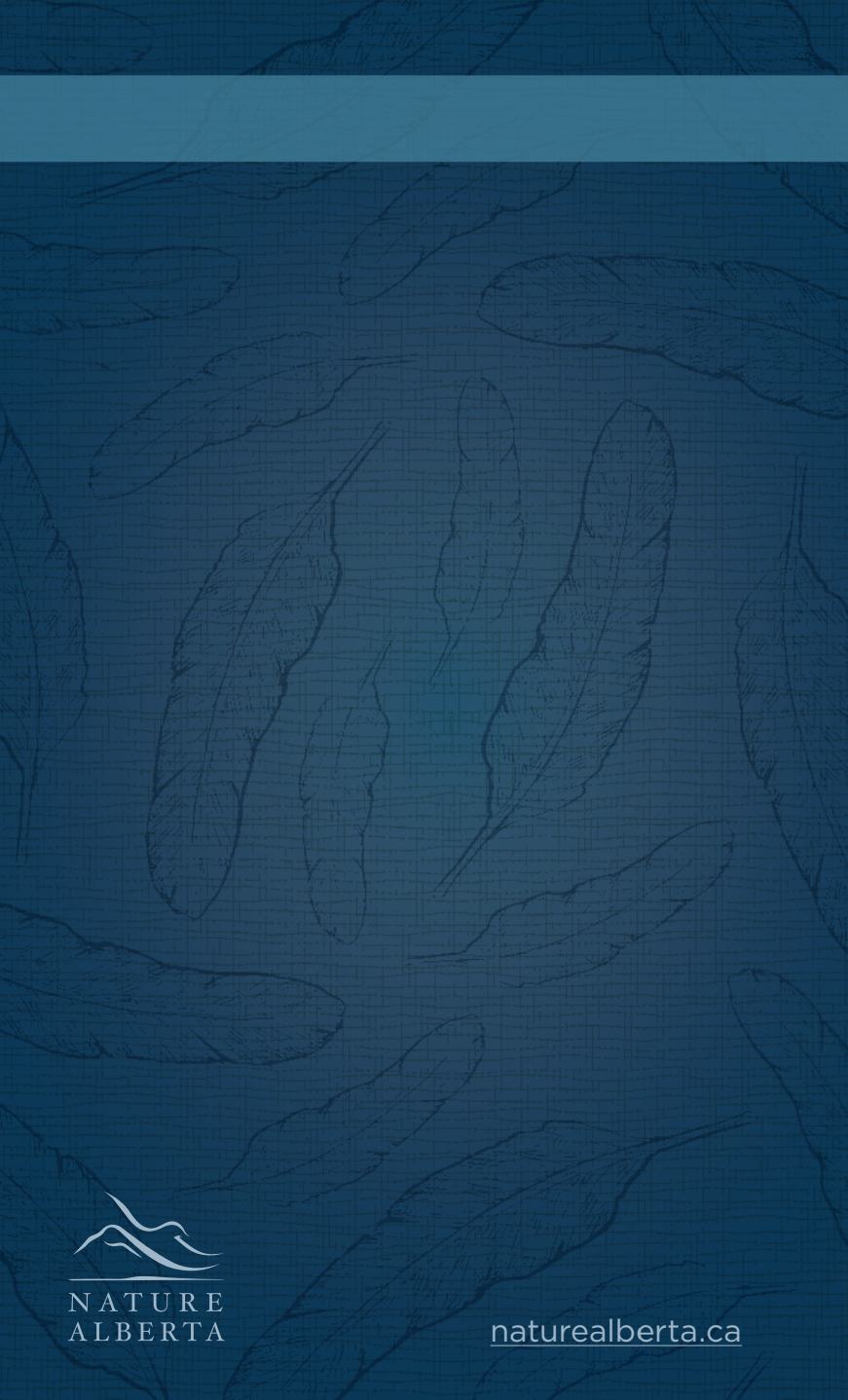
GRASSLAND CHECKLIST

✓	PAGE	IBA	DATE	OBSERVATIONS
	72	Cavendish Rail Line		
	74	Chain Lakes		
	76	Chappice Lake		
	78	Dowling Lake		
	80	Eagle, Namaka and Stobart Lakes		
	82	Frank Lake South		
	84	Handhills Lake		
	86	Hays Reservoir		
	88	Kirkpatrick and Fitzgerald Lakes		
	90	Lake Newell and Kitsim Reservoir		

✓	PAGE	IBA	DATE	OBSERVATIONS
	92	Little Fish Lake		
	94	McGregor Lake and Travers Reservoir		
	96	McIntyre Ranch		
	98	Milk River Canyon and Area		
	100	Pakowki Lake		
	102	Sage Creek		
	104	St. Mary Reservoir		
	106	Suffield		
	108	Sullivan Lake		

NOTES

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