

Esquimalt Lagoon

Migratory Bird Sanctuary

Esquimalt Lagoon is located just west of Esquimalt Harbour in Colwood. The Esquimalt Lagoon MBS was established on December 12, 1931. This 134 hectare sanctuary includes tidal waters from the bridge on Ocean Blvd, to Coburg Peninsula west to the toe of the lagoon and includes 100m of the surrounding land. The shallow tidal waters of the lagoon support thousands of waterfowl from October through May, making this one of the top birding spots in the region. The lagoon harbours rich feeding grounds and a sheltered place for birds to rest on their long migrations up and down the Pacific coast. Several small streams flow into the lagoon year round, providing habitat for Cutthroat Trout and Coho Salmon and other aquatic species. In the lagoon itself bivalves, sand dollars, sea lettuce and eelgrass are abundant.

The lagoon becomes critically important for waterfowl, particularly for those wintering inland, during periods of cold weather when freshwater lakes and ponds freeze. Mudflats, eelgrass and estuary fringe marsh habitats provide excellent foraging and nesting habitats for resident and migratory birds. Two gravel-bar islands and a rocky outcrop near the entrance are important refuge areas for waterfowl. Gulls and herons are often seen feeding here in large numbers.

While there remains excellent bird habitat within the sanctuary, disturbance of birds from boaters and off-leash dogs; habitat loss due to urban development pressure, erosion and park use; and contamination entering the lagoon from failing septic systems and road run-off remain concerns. In 2008, the City of Colwood established a dogs-on-leash bylaw to comply with federal MBS regulations and established an off-leash area west of the public washrooms. In 2009, concerned groups worked with boaters and government agencies to establish Wildlife Refuge Areas to provide “disturbance-free” areas for the birds to feed and rest.

Below: Among the most beautiful and striking birds in the capital region, the **Hooded Merganser** (drake shown) is easily observed close to the shore in salt and brackish water. Hooded Mergansers, along with Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, are common wintering ducks in the Salish Sea.



All bird photos by Stuart Clarke.

MAIN BIRD SPECIES

Shallow waters: American Coot, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Hooded Merganser, Black Oystercatcher, and Pacific Great Blue Heron.

Deeper Waters: Canvasback, Bufflehead, Cormorants and many gull species.

Regionally Rare birds: Eurasian Wigeon, American Golden-plover, Common Tern, Horned Lark and Western Meadowlark.

Esquimalt Lagoon is one of the most popular birding sites in the capital region. As many as 75 species can be seen there in a single day.

The Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (est. 2001) is a coalition of community and environmental groups, citizens, institutions and government agencies (including the Canadian Wildlife Service) working together to protect, enhance and restore the ecosystems at Esquimalt Lagoon. Activities include outreach and education, bird and fish surveys, habitat inventories, environmental monitoring and habitat restoration.



Above: **Pacific Great Blue Heron** is listed as a Species of Special Concern under the federal *Species at Risk Act* but is commonly seen in the three Migratory Bird Sanctuaries of the capital region. Herons and other coastal marine wildlife depend on healthy ecosystems and intact food webs to sustain their populations.

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Making a difference...together



WILDLIFE VIEWING HOT SPOTS

- ① Near Lagoon bridge, great spot to view dozens of Pacific Great Blue Herons feeding in shallows
- ② All along Coburg Peninsula
- ③ Toe of the lagoon, lots of dabbling ducks congregate here
- ④ Colwood Creek estuary. Look for the Western Purple Martin nest boxes on the Royal Roads University dock.