

Fauna of Coats Marsh area, Gabriola Island, BC—a summary

Definitions of terms in italics as used in [File 690](https://nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp690.pdf) (<https://nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp690.pdf>)

- area* specifically one of the six areas identified in the first pages of [File 690](#).
- lake* see *marsh*.
- marsh* specifically the body of open water in Coats Marsh RP, but generally a shallow-water wetland, flooded year round and without trees. Some times identified as “the lake” here and in the Coats Marsh field notes, even though the wetland is technically too shallow to be classified as such.
- region* all six of the *areas* identified in the first pages of [File 690](#).

There is a complete species checklist at Ref. 13.

The Islands Trust Gabriola Sensitive Ecosystem Mapping, Ref. 10, gives no information about fauna.

This is not a professional-grade inventory; it’s just based on an amateur naturalist’s walks in the region. No species of bird have been included that have not been clearly seen and preferably photographed. No insect traps, fish funnel traps, D-frame sweep nets, bird blinds, rodent traps, wildlife cameras, or butterfly nets were used; consequently, be warned, the accounting is inevitably incomplete.

Birds—ravens, crows, jays, eagles, vultures, kingfishers

Ravens (*Corvus corax*) live around the *marsh* year-round and seldom is the day when their call cannot be heard even if by a solitary bird or birds in the far distance. Northwestern crows (*Corvus caurinus*) and Steller's jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) are only occasionally seen.

Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are common around the *lake* only when there are ducklings, and once in a while at this time a golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is seen. Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*), high flying, also regularly patrol the *lake* area.

Belted kingfishers (*Ceryle alcyon*) are very rare visitors to the *lake* given that there are no fish. They appear at times when young frogs/developed tadpoles are numerous.

Birds—small birds in the forest

Spotted towhees (*Pipilo maculatus*) are present year-round and like the ravens, almost always to be heard busying about in the salal. Pacific wrens (*Troglodytes pacificus*) are also common residents. They can be heard even when the woods are otherwise fairly silent.

Small birds, commonly in mixed flocks outside the breeding season, are more often heard than seen. They move up and down in the canopy depending on the weather sometimes giving the impression that they’re here one day, gone the next. The common species are dark-eyed juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), chestnut-backed chickadees (*Poecile rufescens*), and fox sparrows (*Passerella iliaca*). Chickadees are endearing in that they will sometimes approach you if you stand still.

Others seen in the woods include house finches (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), brown creepers (*Certhia americana*), white-crowned sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), and less often pine siskins (*Carduelis pinus*) and Townsend's warblers (*Dendroica townsendi*).

Birds—clearings and forest edges

Birds preferring clearings and forest edges rather than dense coniferous forest include American robins (*Turdus migratorius*), ruby-crowned kinglets (*Regulus calendula*), golden-crowned kinglets (*Regulus satrapa*), orange-crowned warblers (*Vermivora celata*), and often-heard, but seldom-seen, bushtits (*Psaltriparus minimus*).

Violet-green swallows (*Tachycineta thalassina*) usually hunt over the lake in summer evenings but they sometimes make twenty-minute excursions *en masse* to the burn-pile clearings.

Hawks prefer more open landscapes. Seen are Coopers' hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) and less often red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*). Sharp-shinned hawks (*Accipiter striatus*) are almost certainly there too but get mis-identified.

Birds—riparian

Riparian areas including along watercourses dry in summer are favoured by several species including Pacific-slope flycatchers (*Empidonax difficilis*) and song sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*). The ring of snags around the lake is habitat for red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) and cedar waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*), which are both common, and less often seen common yellowthroats (*Geothlypis trichas*) and yellow-rumped warblers (*Setophaga coronata* var. *Auduboni*).

Flocks of purple martins (*Progne subis*), which are blue-listed, are rare but occasionally seen.

Birds—waterfowl, dabbling ducks and waders

One or more of the dabbling duck species, which are capable of short takeoffs, are to be seen most of the year.

A few mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) remain at the end of summer when all others have departed, but their numbers are greatly increased when the winter weather is especially harsh and the lake freezes over. Mallards breed in the lake and are occasionally seen in the NE Arm swamp [area 2] in the wet season.

Other visitors, especially migrants in the spring and fall include American widgeons (*Anas americana*), northern shovelers (*Anas clypeata*), blue-winged teals (*Anas discors*), American coots (*Fulica americana*), and possibly gadwalls (*Anas strepera*). Green-winged teals (*Anas crecca*) may very rarely be present.

Interesting migrants that stay a day or two every year are yellowleg waders (*Tringa* sp.).

Birds—waterfowl, lake ducks

Lake ducks rely on having sufficient open water to gain flight, something they do when humans appear in full view on the shore. Ring-necked ducks (*Aythya collaris*) are common winter residents. Pied-billed grebes (*Podilymbus podiceps*) appear in spring, noisily, sometimes looking tantalizing close to building nests of floating vegetation. Ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) are rare visitors; but the lake may be too small for them.

Birds—swans and geese

Trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) and Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) are regular annual migrants spending a few days at the lake usually in noisy flocks.

Birds—owls and woodpeckers

The only two species of owl that I've seen are great horned owls (*Bubo virginianus*) who hang out near the lake, and barred owls (*Strix varia*), which are fairly common in red-alder groves where the lack of understory to hide prey may be to their liking. I have heard of a very unusual sighting of a snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) in the 707 SW [area 6]. It was looking a bit lost.

Woodpeckers are of course not rare and include northern flickers (*Colaptes auratus*), pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*), red-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*), and hairy woodpeckers (*Picoides villosus*). The Downy woodpeckers (*Picoides pubescens*) while common enough on Gabriola outside the *region*, appear to be absent or very rare perhaps because their preferred habitat has more deciduous trees.

Birds—waterfowl, cavity-nesting

Ducks that use cavities in trees for nests are especially vulnerable to human disturbance along the shoreline. Of the three species that do this, only the hooded mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) do so at the lake for sure—they can be seen with ducklings every year—but two other species can be seen in pairs at the start of the breeding season. These are buffleheads (*Bucephala albeola*), which are winter residents, a few of which always linger in spring, and wood ducks (*Aix sponsa*) which are also seen in pairs in breeding plumage, but are not winter-long residents.

Fish

There are no fish in the lake and creeks in the area though Coats Marsh Creek feeds into Hoggan Lake where there are fish, which technically makes it and the lake subject to riparian area regulation (RAR) Ref. 1A and Ref. 6. Common goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*), which prey on fish, very rarely appear and when they do are quickly gone again.

Mammals

Black bears and cougars are rumours only. Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus* ssp. *columbianus*) are common even in winter, though curiously they appear to avoid the trails and are seen more often in the bush, which is an interesting contrast to their behaviour along roads and in people's yards.

The handful of other mammals include racoons (*Procyon lotor*), red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), and beavers (*Castor canadensis*). Rodents are not commonly observed unless they are the dead victims of, presumably, owls. Only ubiquitous deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*) and the Townsend's voles (*Microtus townsendii*) that are fleeing flooding in the swamps have been observed. Bats (*Myotis californicus*) are present or active in the summer months.

Reptiles and amphibians

Reptiles are rare. Only garter snakes (*Thamnophis ordinoides*) are numerous. There was a clear sighting of a northwestern alligator lizard (*Elgaria coerulea principis*) in the eastern burn-pile clearing in Coats Marsh RP a few years ago, but it has not been seen since.

Pacific tree frogs (*Pseudacris regilla*) are abundant and the blue-listed northern red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora*) are often seen. Other amphibians observed include the western long-toed salamander (*Ambystoma macrodactylum*) and rough-skinned newt (*Taricha granulosa*).

It is a pity that professional ecologists are routinely only engaged for a short period in helping to formulate management plans. The author of Ref. 1A remarks "early December, following a

week of cold weather, is possibly the worst time and conditions to document the presence of amphibians and reptiles”. No follow-up visits later in the year were made. You can’t accurately assess an area’s fauna without regular visits throughout the year. Also to be noted is the observation that “Coats Marsh without the presence of fish is excellent habitat for amphibians and reptiles Sticklebacks would compete with amphibians for a food source.”

Insects—dragonflies and damselflies

Coats Marsh RP lake is, along with Nelders Pond and the Commons Pond, an excellent place to view several kinds of dragonflies and damselflies throughout the summer and into late fall. They thrive there.

Recorded are Canada darners (*Aeshna canadensis*); blue-eyed darners (*Aeshna multicolor*); Tule bluets (*Enallagma carunculatum*); western pondhawks (*Erythemis collocata*); Pacific forktails (*Ischnura cervula*); eight-spotted skimmers (*Libellula forensis*); four-spotted skimmers (*Libellula quadrimaculata*); blue dashers (*Pachydiplax longipennis*) which are blue-listed; white-faced meadowhawks (*Sympetrum obtrusum*); western meadowhawk (*Sympetrum occidentale*); and aptly named autumn meadowhawks (*Sympetrum vicinum*).

Insects—butterflies and moths

About seven species of butterflies have been seen, mostly in the greenswards. The list is spring azures (blues, *Celastrina echo*); wood nymphs (*Cercyonis pegala* possibly also *Cercyonis oetus*); Lorquin's admirals (*Limenitis lorquini* ssp. *ilgae*) striking and fairly common; mylitta crescentspots (*Phyciodes mylitta*); western tiger swallowtails (*Pterourus rutulus*); imported Essex skippers (*Thymelicus lineola*), rare on Vancouver Island; and red admirals (*Vanessa atalanta*). A few others remain with uncertain identities.

Moths in the forest are difficult as they often appear to never stop and settle. Species identified with some confidence include polyphemus moths (*Antheraea polyphemus*); ceanothus silk moths (*Hyalophora euryalus*); half-white carpet moths (*Mesoleuca gratulata*); pale glyph moths (*Protodeltote albidula*) that hide in the grass and are almost impossible to photograph; and cinnabar moths (*Tyria jacobaea*).

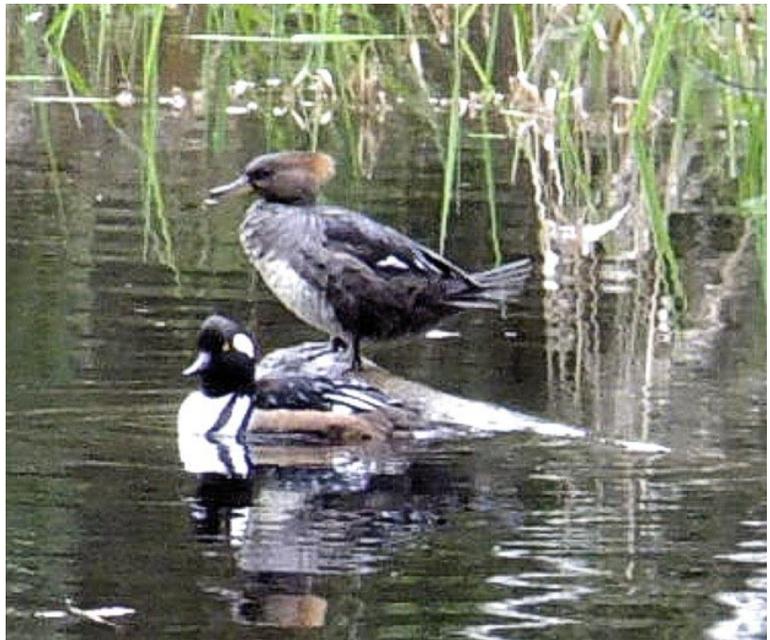
Insects—others

Other casually observed insects include grasshoppers (*Trimerotropis pallidipennis*, *Milanoplus femurrubrum*); ants, mainly wood ants (*Formica obscuripes*); psyllids (*Psylla floccosa*); a California wood borer (*Prionus californicus*); and a few aquatic species, water striders (*Gerris buenoi*), water boatmen (*Callicorixa scudderi*), etc. A very incomplete list.

Gallery





















References

- Ref. 1: Coats Marsh Regional Park — 2011–2021 Management Plan, RDN Recreation and Parks Department, August 29, 2011. Online at <https://www.rdn.bc.ca/2222>
- Ref. 1A: Coats Marsh Regional Park — 2011–2021 Management Plan, Appendix A, Ecological Features and Management Recommendations
- Ref. 2: 707 Community Park — 2010–2020 Management Plan, RDN Recreation and Parks Department, August 2010. Online at <https://www.rdn.bc.ca/cms.asp?wpID=2019>
- Ref. 2F: 707 Community Park — 2010–2020 Management Plan, Appendix F, 707CP Ecological Inventory
- Ref. 6: Madrone Environmental Services, Gabriola Island Riparian Area Regulation Stream Identification, February 24, 2012. Online at <http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/342841/gbrptriparianarearegulation.pdf>
- Ref. 10: Gabriola Island Sensitive Ecosystem Mapping, Airphoto 2007. Online at <http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/media/20227/orgmapsemgabriola.pdf> downloaded November 2018. See pp.22–23 of Ref. 13A for an extract.
- Ref. 13: Doe, Nick, Observations at Coats Marsh, Gabriola Island, British Columbia—species checklists. Online and regularly updated at <https://nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp679.pdf>
- Ref. 13A: Doe, Nick, Flora of Coats Marsh area, February 2019. Online at <https://nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp692.pdf>