



BURKE MOUNTAIN NATURALISTS

The Birds of Minnehada Regional Park and Area

Nestled at the foot of Burke Mountain in northeast Coquitlam is a little bit of paradise called Minnehada Regional Park. The variety of habitats, ranging from high rocky knolls to marshes, from deep coniferous woods and stands of alder and birch, to brushy thickets is reflected in the diversity of birds present. Hawks, owls, grouse, waterfowl, herons, woodpeckers and a variety of songbirds make the Park a satisfying destination for birdwatchers.

Bird records have been collected over a number of years by interested birders, by staff of the Great Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) Parks Department and by members of the Burke Mountain Naturalists. As of September 2006, the bird species list contains 160 species. This includes birds observed in the Park and in the immediate vicinity, including Addington Marsh, the fields in front of Minnehada Lodge and along Oliver Road east of the Park gate. We recommend that you obtain a Park map, available at the entrance kiosks, and carry a good bird guide to aid in bird identification.

YEAR ROUND

A number of bird species live in the Park year round and are called "resident" species. Although you should be able to find them at any time of the year, some are more readily observed in certain seasons.

From the Quarry Road parking lot, the trail passes through a stand of red alder before entering a forest of cedar, hemlock and Douglas fir. Here the trail forks and forks again, giving birders the choice of longer or shorter walks. One trail encircles the Park and takes in a variety of habitats. From this main trail, several others branch off to the marsh located in the centre of the Park. Following the perimeter trail with side-trips to the marsh will enable the careful observer to find a number of different birds.

Black-capped Chickadees can be found anywhere in the Park, while the similar but less-common **Chestnut-backed Chickadees** are usually found in the coniferous woods. A high-pitched two-note call indicates the secretive **Brown Creeper**. This tiny bird spirals up a tree trunk, probing the bark for insects. Another small forest-dweller is the **Red-breasted Nuthatch** which scurries down tree trunks head-first looking for insects that the Creeper over-looked on its upward journey. Other birds to

look for in the coniferous woods at any time of year are **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Downy Woodpeckers** and **Hairy Woodpeckers**, and the crow-sized **Pileated Woodpecker**. Signs of recent Pileated Woodpecker activity are elongated holes and fresh woodchips at the base of a "wildlife tree" (also called a snag, which is a dead or dying tree).

Both **Ruffed Grouse** and **Sooty Grouse** inhabit the Park but tend to be fairly secretive except in spring when their loud booming calls can be heard anywhere in the Park. One of the better locations to find **Ruffed Grouse** is along the North Trail. **Winter Wrens** are abundant and their long, musical song is one of the prettiest to fill the woods.

Brushy thickets along the marsh attract a number of species including **Song Sparrows**, **Spotted Towhees**, and **Marsh Wrens**. **Great Blue Herons** feed in the marsh year round, along with **Mallards** and **Wood Ducks**.

SPRING

By March, **Tree Swallows**, **Violet-green Swallows** and **Barn Swallows** can be found swooping over the marsh. **Cliff Swallows** and **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** occur in smaller numbers at this time.

American Bittern, **Sora** and **Virginia Rail** along with the fish-eating **Pied-billed Grebe** should all be looked for in the South Marsh. Did you know that many species of grebes, including the Pied-billed, consume large quantities of their own feathers? Some biologists believe they do this because they cannot readily digest fish bones. The feathers may act as padding to protect their stomachs against punctures from sharp bones.

From the Panabode Trail, a short side-trail leads outside Park boundaries to a lookout offering superb views over Addington Marsh and the Pitt River. From here, scan the marsh for ducks such as **Cinnamon Teal** and **Blue-winged Teal** which have returned by mid-spring. If you are very lucky, you may see a **Sandhill Crane**. From a distance, these stately birds can be confused with herons but in fact they are quite different and belong in a separate family. **Sandhill Cranes** have slate-grey plumage, sometimes tinged with brown, a distinctive red patch on their forehead and a considerably shorter bill than a heron. If you see them in flight, notice the long straight neck. Herons fly with their neck held in an s-curve, not outstretched like a crane. **Northern Harriers** are readily identified by their long tail, slender wings and white rump patch. They can be found coursing low over the marsh, hunting for rodents. Spring migration can sometimes yield the unexpected. One year, a **White-throated Sparrow** turned up in April at the end of Oliver Road adjacent to the Park.

SUMMER

By summer, most species are well into the business of rearing young and some early nesters are already on their

second broods. Standing dead trees ("wildlife trees") provide sites for cavity nesting **Tree Swallows**, **Violet-green Swallows**, **Downy Woodpeckers**, **Hairy Woodpeckers**, chickadees, nuthatches and a host of other species.

A number of neotropical migrants return each year to nest in the Park. Swallows, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, grosbeaks, thrushes and tanagers all spend most of their lives in the tropics, but come north to breed. **Swainson's Thrushes**, **Black-headed Grosbeaks** and **Western Tanagers** are among the later arrivals. Look for them in mid- to late-May. **Swainson's Thrushes** are usually found in the coniferous woods, along with **Townsend's Warblers** and **Western Tanagers**.

Riparian (streamside) vegetation along the marsh and by Addington Marsh provides nesting habitat for many species. Listen for the easily recognized "fitz-bew" song of the **Willow Flycatchers**. You might be fortunate to see male **Common Yellowthroat Warblers** performing showy display flights in which they rise up to 30 metres in the air, singing loudly as they go – all to attract a female. **Yellow Warblers**, **Wilson's Warblers**, **Marsh Wrens** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** are some of the other species that find a home in this habitat.

Woods dominated by alder trees form only a small section of the Park but they provide habitat for **Warbling Vireo** and **Red-eyed Vireo**. In the dense understory, **Bewick's Wrens** find safe nest sites in downed logs or brushy piles.

If you walk quietly along the ditches by Addington Marsh, you might flush the uncommon **Green Heron** which nests in nearby DeBoville Slough. **Eastern Kingbirds** are sometimes seen in the vicinity of the marsh and the rare **Western Kingbird** has been observed in front of Minnehada Lodge.

From the Dyke Trail, head up to the Low Knoll which offers a bird's-eye view of the North and South Marshes. From here, you may spot a resident **Red-tailed Hawk** or even a **Turkey Vulture**, a summer visitor to the area. On days when the clouds lie low, flocks of both **Black Swifts** and **Vaux's Swifts** can be seen from the this vantage point. Swifts fly on stiffly-held wings that seldom seem to move. If you are feeling ambitious, a trek to the top of High Knoll will provide even more wide-ranging views across Addington Marsh to the Pitt River where **Ospreys** can often be seen fishing.

Rarities don't occur only during migration, and it is best to keep you eyes and ears open throughout the year for unexpected surprises, such as the **Chipping Sparrow** which turned up here one June. Also in June, there was a confirmed report of an **American Redstart** warbler. Erratic species such as many 'winter finches' can arrive in any season and **White-winged Crossbills** were recorded in the Park one summer. On three occasions over the

years, a **Lewis's Woodpecker** has been observed near the park in early September.

FALL

As the days shorten, birds get ready for their long southward journey. By mid-September most of the swallows have departed, followed over the next few weeks by warblers, flycatchers, vireos and other neotropical migrants. Their numbers are often briefly swollen as birds from further north pass through this area.

Many overwintering species begin arriving by October. The pasture in front of the Lodge often holds **Northern Shrikes** which were once known as "butcher birds" from their habit of impaling prey on thorns. **Short-eared Owls** and **Rough-legged Hawks** also frequent this habitat.

Various sparrows begin to make their appearance as fall progresses. The rather elusive **Lincoln's Sparrow** can be found in shrubby thickets around the marsh. **Fox Sparrows** are often confused with **Song Sparrows**, but look for a chunkier build, an unstriped head, very heavy breast streakings and a pale lower bill. The **Fox Sparrow** overwinters in the area. Look also for **Golden-crowned Sparrows** and **White-crowned Sparrows** in the brushy thickets along the marsh and by cleared areas.

Over the years, some interesting species have turned up in the Minnehada Park area. Perhaps the most noteworthy to date was the **Common Poorwill** found dead on Quarry Road in October 1987. This species is considered 'accidental' in the Greater Vancouver Region.

WINTER

Waterfowl numbers increase in winter months and many of the species counted in the Park and area are found during this season. The North Marsh is one of the best places locally to see **Ring-necked Ducks**. Look also for the common **Green-winged Teal**, **Bufflehead**, **Hooded Merganser** and **Common Merganser**, **Northern Shoveler**, **American Widgeon** and other species.

Northern Pygmy Owls have been seen during the winter near Addington Marsh at the east end of Oliver Road and on the Low Knoll in the Park. **Great Horned Owls** are easier to find in late winter when they begin breeding. Look for them especially along the Panabode Trail near the picnic area by the Lodge.

Raptors are more readily found at this time of year. Both **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **Cooper's Hawk**, two small woodland hawks nearly identical in plumage and shape, can be found along the forest edges. Falcons are identified by their long tail, pointed wings, rounded head and generally, a moustache stripe. Look for **American Kestrel**, the larger **Peregrine Falcon**, and the smaller and darker **Merlin**. Winter can bring other interesting birds such as **Townsend's Solitaire**, a grey thrush with white outer tail feathers. Look for it especially in front of the Lodge.

BIRD LIST FOR MINNEKHADA REGIONAL PARK AND AREA

The following is a list of the 160 species observed in Minnekhada Park and in the immediate area. Given current information (in 2006), the species have been classified as common, uncommon, rare or casual according to the likelihood of a sighting when in-season. The taxonomic order and names comply with the American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds 7th edition and the 47th supplement.

Common is defined as a species that should be found in suitable habitat on every visit. **Uncommon** indicates that the species is not easily found, but is present in limited numbers and/or is secretive and hard to spot. **Rare** means that the species can be present in very low number or may be very difficult to find. **Casual** identifies a species considered very rare, with only 1-3 known records.

Introduced species have an **[I]** after their name. They are not native to this area, but are known to have been present for more than 10 years.

COMMON

Canada Goose	Barn Swallow
Wood Duck	Black-capped Chickadee
American Widgeon	Bush-tit
Mallard	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Green-winged Teal	Winter Wren
Ring-necked Duck	Marsh Wren
Bufflehead	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Hooded Merganser	Swainson's Thrush
Common Merganser	American Robin
Ring-necked Pheasant	Varied Thrush
Great Blue Heron	European Starling [I]
Osprey	Cedar Waxwing
Bald Eagle	Orange-crowned Warbler
Northern Harrier	Yellow Warbler
Red-tailed Hawk	Common Yellowthroat
Glaucous-winged Gull	Wilson's Warbler
Rufous Hummingbird	Spotted Towhee
Downy Woodpecker	Savannah Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Song Sparrow
Willow Flycatcher	White-crowned Sparrow
Warbling Vireo	Dark-eyed Junco
Red-eyed Vireo	Black-headed Grosbeak
Steller's Jay	Red-winged Blackbird
Northwestern Crow	Brewer's Blackbird
Common Raven	Brown-headed Cowbird
Tree Swallow	House Finch
Violet-green Swallow	Pine Siskin
Cliff Swallow	American Goldfinch

UNCOMMON

Cackling Goose	Red-breasted Sapsucker
Trumpeter Swan	Hairy Woodpecker
Gadwall	Pileated Woodpecker
Blue-winged Teal	Olive-sided Flycatcher
Cinnamon Teal	Western Wood-Pewee
Northern Pintail	Hammond's Flycatcher
Lesser Scaup	Pacific-slope Flycatcher
Common Goldeneye	Eastern Kingbird
Barrow's Goldeneye	Northern Shrike
Sooty Grouse	Cassin's Vireo
Ruffed Grouse	Hutton's Vireo
Pied-billed Grebe	Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Double-crested Cormorant	Chestnut-backed Chickadee
American Bittern	Brown Creeper
Green Heron	Bewick's Wren
Turkey Vulture	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Hermit Thrush
Cooper's Hawk	American Pipit
Rough-legged Hawk	Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Kestrel	Black-throated Gray Warbler
Virginia Rail	Townsend's Warbler
Sora	MacGillivray's Warbler
American Coot	Western Tanager
Killdeer	Fox Sparrow
Wilson's Snipe	Lincoln's Sparrow
Mew Gull	Golden-crowned Sparrow
California Gull	Bullock's Oriole
Rock Pigeon [I]	Purple Finch
Band-tailed Pigeon	Red Crossbill
Great Horned Owl	Evening Grosbeak
Common Nighthawk	House Sparrow [I]
Black Swift	
Vaux's Swift	
Belted Kingfisher	

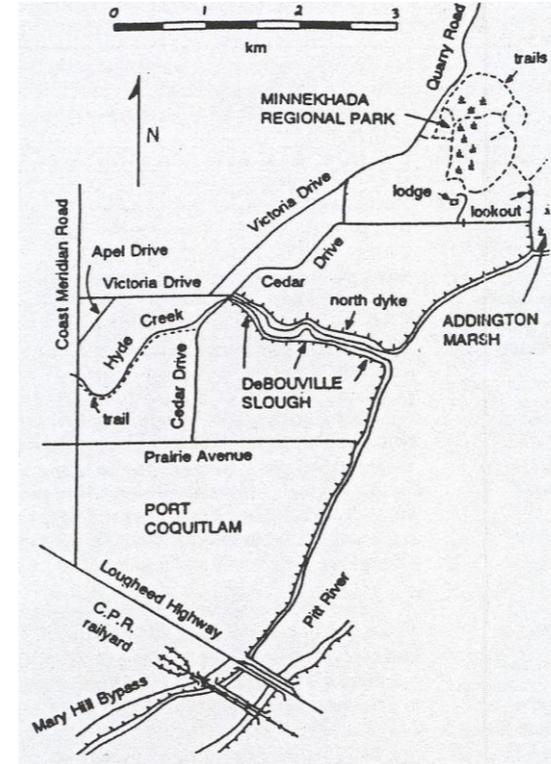
RARE

Snow Goose	Thayer's Gull
Tundra Swan	Caspian Tern
Northern Shoveler	Mourning Dove
Greater Scaup	Barn Owl
Red-breasted Merganser	Western Screech-Owl
Ruddy Duck	Northern Pygmy Owl
Common Loon	Barred Owl
Horned Grebe	Short-eared Owl
Merlin	Western Kingbird
Peregrine Falcon	Gray Catbird
Sandhill Crane	Townsend's Solitaire
Greater Yellowlegs	Bohemian Waxwing
Pectoral Sandpiper	Western Meadowlark
	White-winged Crossbill

CASUAL

Northern Goshawk	Lewis's Woodpecker
Spotted Sandpiper	Least Flycatcher
Lesser Yellowlegs	American Redstart
Long-billed Dowitcher	Chipping Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	White-throated Sparrow
Common Poorwill	Yellow-headed Blackbird

Getting There:



DIRECTIONS:
Minnekhada Regional Park is located in northeast Coquitlam, 7 km from the Lougheed Highway. Turn north onto Coast Meridian Road and follow the signs to the Quarry Road entrance and parking area.

CAUTION: ALWAYS LOCK YOUR VEHICLE, AND LEAVE NOTHING OF VALUE VISIBLE FROM OUTSIDE.

No cycling or motorized vehicles on the trails. Dogs are welcome, but must be on leash.

Other Nearby Areas:

DeBoville Slough and the Pitt River dykes are adjacent to Minnekhada Regional Park and both offer superb bird-watching opportunities. To learn more about these areas, pick up a copy of the Burke Mountain Naturalists' brochure "The Birds of DeBoville Slough" and another brochure describing the natural history of DeBoville Slough at your local library or from our website given below.

Contact Information

- Burke Mountain Naturalists**
 PO Box 52540,
 RPO Coquitlam Centre,
 COQUITLAM BC, V3B 7J4.
 604-937-3483
<http://www.bmn.bc.ca>

The BMN holds meetings on the second Tuesday of each month (except June, July and August) at Como Lake United Church, 535 Marmont St. in Coquitlam. Regular walks and hikes are organized throughout the year. New members are always welcome; feel free to attend our meetings to find out more.

BMN wants to hear of any unusual wildlife you see. Your observations will contribute to our knowledge of the local environment.

- Greater Vancouver Regional District, Central Area Parks Office**
 9174 Avalon Avenue
 BURNABY, BC, V3N 7J4
 Tel: 604-520-6442
www.gvrd.bc.ca/parks/Minnekhada.htm

A map showing the features and facilities in Minnekhada Park is available on the GVRD web site (in pdf format).

Text by Christine Hanrahan. The bird data were originally compiled by Christine Hanrahan (1993) and were updated by Larry Cowan (2006).

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