

Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary

This urban sanctuary - the first MBS in Pacific Canada - was established on October 27, 1923 to curb hunting of birds like Brant. It includes 1840 hectares of marine and estuarine waters of Portage Inlet, Gorge Waterway, Victoria Harbour as well as the coastal waters of the Salish Sea from Macaulay Pt to Ogden Pt, around Clover Pt and Oak Bay to Ten Mile Pt, including the Trial Islands. It also contains three provincial Ecological Reserves and a Rockfish Conservation Area. Nearby in Oak Bay is the internationally recognized Chain Islets & Great Chain Island Important Bird Area.

Habitats include shallow and fast-moving tidal waters, kelp forests, eelgrass and surfgrass meadows, mud flats, tidal marshes, small estuaries (Colquitz, Craigflower and Bowker), shellfish beds, fish and krill nurseries, sand and pebble beaches, rocky shores and several islands with maritime meadows and dwarf Garry oaks. The sanctuary provides important habitat for all kinds of birds and wildlife, including rare and endangered plants of the Garry oak associated ecosystems (Macoun's meadowfoam, Victoria's Owl-clover), Olympia Oysters (Species of Special Concern), Northern Abalone and Southern Resident Orcas (Endangered).

While bird numbers are relatively low compared to the past, wildlife diversity in our region is remarkably high for an urban area. Extensive loss of riparian and shoreline habitat, especially large trees and snags, as a result of urban development contributes to low bird numbers. Contamination from urban runoff remains a concern, however, recent environmental cleanups have improved water quality in Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway. This has led to a resurgence in recreational uses in and along the waterway, including dog-walking, paddling sports, swimming, and anchored boats. These increased water use in the sanctuary are of concern to many in the community with a desire to protect migrating birds and their habitat.

The noisy and comic displays of the **Black Oystercatcher** enliven our rocky shores year-round. This large shorebird nests on several islands and islets. In winter up to 75 oystercatchers congregate and roost on islets near Kitty Islet in Oak Bay.



All bird photos by Stuart Clarke.

MAIN BIRD SPECIES

Outer coast, winter (map sites 1-7): Bufflehead, Surf Scoter, Pacific Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Harlequin Duck, Black-bellied Plover, Black Turnstone and Mew Gull.

Protected waters, winter (map sites 8-14): American Wigeon, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Bufflehead.

In summer Rhinoceros Auklet, Heermann's Gull, California Gull, Western Purple Martin, Violet-green Swallow and Osprey are regularly seen.

Year-round residents include Glaucous-winged Gull, Pigeon Guillemot, Black Oystercatcher, Pelagic Cormorant, Bald Eagle, Pacific Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Anna's Hummingbird, Northwestern Crow and Common Raven.

The Friends of Victoria Harbour MBS (est. 2014) promotes the MBS and the amazing variety of wildlife it supports. Activities include regular bird surveys and collaborating with others to promote conservation and stewardship of the MBS. FoVHMBS was instrumental in the designation of the three regional MBSs as NatureHoods (2015) for their exceptional wildlife and opportunities to experience nature.

The Gorge Waterway Initiative (est. 2005) is a collaborative group of organizations, supported by the Capital Regional District, working to protect and enhance the natural and cultural features of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and the surrounding watersheds. Activities include outreach and education, Purple Martin next box program, habitat inventories and restoration and promotion of the sanctuary.



The coastal areas of the MBS provide some of the best alcid (auk) viewing in urban Canada. Rhinoceros Auklet (above), Pigeon Guillemot, Marbled Murrelet, Ancient Murrelet, Common Murre, Tufted Puffin and Cassin's Auklet are all observed here.

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SALISH SEA



Projection: UTM ZONE 10N NAD 83
 This map is for general information only and may contain inaccuracies.

- ① Wildlife Viewpoint
- Important Bird Area
- ▭ Ecological Reserve
- ▭ Migratory Bird Sanctuary
- ▭ Rockfish Conservation Area
- Creek/Ditch
- ▭ Water Body

WILDLIFE VIEWING HOT SPOTS

- ① Gyro Park/Cadboro Bay
- ② Cattle Pt
- ③ Turkey Head / Oak Bay Marina
- ④ Kitty Islet
- ⑤ Clover Pt
- ⑥ Ogden Pt Breakwater
- ⑦ Macaulay Pt
- ⑧ West Bay Walkway
- ⑨ Selkirk Trestle

- ⑩ Esquimalt Gorge Park
- ⑪ Gorge Waterway Park
- ⑫ Craigflower Bridge
- ⑬ Cuthbert Holmes Park
- ⑭ Helmcken Centennial Park