

# Shoal Harbour

## Migratory Bird Sanctuary

This sanctuary was established on April 10, 1931 and includes 144 hectares of sheltered bays and extensive intertidal mudflats in North Saanich and Sidney. It is contiguous with the internationally-recognized Sidney Channel Important Bird Area. The shoreline is a mix of rocky outcrops and beaches of sand, gravel and silt and the upland areas support remnants of the Coastal Douglas-Fir ecosystem, including the associated Garry oak and Arbutus. Portions of the sanctuary contain mud flats that are exposed at low tide and support a productive marine fauna and flora including clams, worms, sea lettuce and eelgrass.

Although the sanctuary is now surrounded by dense urban development and includes many marinas, the ecosystem still supports a rich diversity of seabirds, shorebirds and waterfowl during migration and through winter. More than forty species of marine birds are regularly seen here, as well as more than forty species of passerine (perching) birds in the uplands, many not found elsewhere in Canada. Pacific Great Blue Herons, a BC listed Species at Risk, are frequently seen here in large numbers feeding in the shallow mudflats.

The proliferation of marinas and long-term anchored boats within the sanctuary and the associated contamination has raised concerns over their impact on marine birds and their habitat. Ongoing development pressure, urban runoff, land clearing and tree removal on the lands adjacent to the sanctuary are also of concern.

Below: The world's most punctual bird. The **Bufflehead** arrives on its wintering ground on or near the 298th day of the solar calendar each year (October 15). Friends of Shoal Harbour Society organizes an annual All Buffleheads Day to celebrate its return.



All bird photos by Stuart Clarke.

### MAIN BIRD SPECIES

**Protected waters (map sites 1-6):** Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Mergansers (3 species), Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Mallard, Cormorants (2 species), Pacific Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Gulls (several species).

**Outer coast (map site 7):** Nearshore reefs provide important roosting sites for Harlequin Ducks, Black Oystercatchers, Black-bellied Plovers, Black Turnstones, Eurasian Wigeon, various Sandpipers and Gulls, including Heerman's, Glaucous-winged, Mew, Bonaparte's, California, and even a Laughing Gull.

**Offshore in Sidney Channel Important Bird Area:** Pigeon Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet, Common Murre, Grebes (3 species), Loons (3 species), Cormorants (including Brandt's), Surf Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks and Brant Geese.

The **Friends of Shoal Harbour Society** (est. 1991) actively promotes development of an integrated management plan for the MBS to be jointly directed by the Town of Sidney and District of North Saanich. Activities include protecting key bird habitat, outreach, education and organizing All Buffleheads Day celebrations.



The beautiful **Harlequin Duck** is a common, year-round resident in our sanctuaries that is often found foraging among the seaweed along marine rocky shores. Their plumage is most beautiful in winter. In summer, flocks of flightless, moulting drakes and hens occur at several sites.



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