

PATHWAYS TO NATURE

The walking trails in Fredericton are enjoyed by a variety of interest groups. Certainly, the majority of trail users are cyclists, walkers, runners and dog walkers but there is another group of avid trail users – birdwatchers - who, for the most part, go relatively unnoticed.

The trail network in Fredericton offers local bird watchers the opportunity to visit diverse bird habitats that ordinarily would be inaccessible. With well-maintained trails running both along and over the Nashwaak and St. John rivers, birdwatchers are able to walk or bicycle through floodplain and mixed forest and open fields, all of which offer good chances to view birds as they go about their daily activities.

Spring, summer, and fall are the best seasons for bird watching in Fredericton; spring and fall being the times when the sighting of rare birds is most likely due to migration patterns. As at most inland New Brunswick communities, winter bird observation in Fredericton is best at home feeder stations. Whatever the time of year, a stroll along our walking trails and city streets or a scan of the river can offer unexpected surprises.

This article describes three examples of good bird watching sites readily accessed by the Fredericton trail system. You may have passed through these areas without realizing that such biological diversity was so close at hand. The next time you venture out along our trails, consider packing a pair of binoculars and bird identification book in a knapsack and take some extra time to stop and see what birds you can observe and identify. You may gain a whole new appreciation of the natural beauty opened up for you.

Carleton Park, Fredericton North

This area is best for birding from spring until late fall. Common gull species seen at this location are Ring Billed, Great Black-backed, and Herring Gulls. Double-crested Cormorants can be seen flying and feeding on the river there, along with various duck species such as Mallard, Black and Goldeneye. Some unusual birds have been identified in this location during the past few years, for example Sabine's Gull, Whimbrel and Great Cormorant. Local birders have also spotted Snow Goose, Black-headed Gull as well as diving ducks such as Scoters, Long-tailed Duck and Common Eider. The picturesque view of the UNB campus, Christ Church Cathedral, and the historical riverfront homes of Fredericton South is an added bonus.

Gibson Trail, Marysville

The Gibson Trail provides access to a nice blend of habitats for birding such as open field, Silver Maple floodplain forest, and hardwood forest.

As the trail begins [Marysville] you will notice it is lined with trees and shrubs in which a few birds such as Red-winged Blackbird, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Kingbird and Song Sparrow may be spotted. The open field to the right has pockets of standing water that can harbour duck species and Killdeer, as well as American Bittern. The plowed field on the left of the trail attracts many ducks in the spring when flooded: primarily Ring-necked, Black and Wood Ducks. Northern Shrikes have been seen there during the fall and winter.

Continuing along the trail into the woods you will see the Nashwaak River on your right. Assorted duck species including Mergansers may be seen as well as Great Blue Heron and Double-crested Cormorant. Ospreys and Bald Eagles may be seen either perching in the mature trees or flying overhead in search of food.

The mature Silver Maple floodplain forest to the right of the trail and the deciduous hardwood forest to the left offer a full range of associated species including Ovenbird, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Black-capped Chickadee, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Waterthrush and Great-crested Flycatcher. Barred Owls are known to nest in this forest. During springtime, the area plays host to many songbird species as they gorge on the abundant insect life before continuing their journey to their nesting sites.

The whole Gibson Trail is a lovely trail to visit more than once as it undergoes a change of bird species as the seasons turn. Even when the birding isn't productive it is still a great place to have an invigorating walk and experience nature.

Fredericton Wildlife Refuge, Morell Park, The Green

This is a rich, four-seasons bird watching area. It is underwater during spring flooding, but becomes a gathering area for gulls and ducks as the water recedes. Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Mew and Franklin's Gulls among others, have been seen there during that time. In spring and summer the canopy of Silver Maple and Red Oak provides feeding and sites for a large number of species, from the various woodpeckers, thrushes, and nuthatches, to warblers, Wood Duck, and Common Goldeneye.

In autumn the area is active with migratory waterfowl and songbirds. Species very rare in the area feed in the trees and at nearby bird-feeding stations. Walking to and from the Fredericton Wildlife Refuge along the St. John River and historic Waterloo Row could prove to be one of the most scenic and relaxing strolls Fredericton has to offer.

Species such as Leach's Storm-Petrel, Canvasback Duck, Carolina Wren, Western Kingbird and Kentucky Warbler have been identified there. On a winter day, warmed by the sun, this area can come alive with bird activity as Redpolls, Pine Siskins, Black-capped Chickadees, American Goldfinches, nuthatches and Hairy and Downy Woodpecker.

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