

Southampton Plain

Not represented

28



Southampton Island

BY THE BAY OF GOD'S MERCY

The world is transformed, within a week or two, from a silent expanse to a place of amazing activity and noise. Everywhere the sounds of mating birds mingle with the cracking of ice along the shore, the roar of swelling streams and the laughter of Eskimo children... Lemmings ... bask in the sun ... butterflies wander about, the green grass shoots up, the willow catkins expand and droop....

*George Sutton,
naturalist and explorer,
1924, describing June on
Southampton Island*

THE LAND:

This relatively small natural region includes part of Southampton Island, two other large islands and several smaller islands in the northern part of Hudson Bay. The combination of limestone and dolomite bedrock and dwarf arctic shrub vegetation makes this region distinct. The coastal plain is low lying with many small lakes, marshes, wet meadows and broad tidal flats. Raised beaches, evidence of higher sea levels in the past and the rebounding of the land after being released from the weight of the glaciers, parallel the coast. Much of this region was flooded after the retreat of the glaciers, effectively obliterating glacial landforms except for a few scattered eskers. Inland are large limestone plateaux covered by frost-shattered rock where little life is found.

VEGETATION:

The barrens here are truly barren; large areas support only scattered clumps of the shrub dryas, its white blossoms brighten-



Coats Island

ing the shattered limestone that covers the ground. Much of the coast is devoid of vegetation. However, comparatively lush wet meadows of sedges and willows and rich tidal marshes occur where rivers enter the sea. Large grassy meadows also occur in the interior. In sheltered areas along river valleys, willows, the only "tree" occurring in this region, may reach two metres in height.

Natural Region 28

WILDLIFE:

Most of the mammals living here - arctic hare, lemmings, short-tailed weasel, arctic fox, polar bear and caribou - are species characteristic of the Arctic. Caribou and wolves were killed off on Southampton Island in the 1950s. However, caribou have been reintroduced and are thriving.



Walrus

The large walrus population which frequent the surrounding marine waters find important haul out grounds throughout the region. Shorebirds and waterfowl are abundant along the wet coastal meadows and tidal flats. Some of Canada's largest colonies of snow geese and Canada geese, along with the rare Ross's goose, nest in the rich sedge meadows of the Boas River Delta. Southampton Island is home to a nesting area of over 300,000 snow geese. Large colonies of thick-billed murres are found on Coats Island, one of the large offshore islands in Hudson Bay.

STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

No national park has been established yet in this region. A study completed in 1981 identified several possible areas for consideration. However, following negotiation of Inuit land selections under the Nunavut land claim, large portions of all of those areas became Inuit land. Further studies might identify alternative areas but to be truly representative, a national park in this region would need a reasonable amount of coast line, most of which is Inuit settlement land.

Any national park established here would have to take into consideration the fact that hunting, trapping and fishing, the tra-

ditional land uses of the Arctic, are still carried on in this region. Seals, walrus, beluga, polar bear and caribou are the main species hunted; trapping for arctic fox provides income for many residents.

Parks Canada is watching with interest discussions between the Canadian Wildlife Service and local people about the creation of a national wildlife area on Coats Island, one of the primary representative areas identified in Parks Canada's 1981 study.

Establishment of a national park in this natural region would require the support and co-operation of the residents of Coral Harbour, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the Kivalliq Inuit Association and the Government of the Northwest Territories.



**Major Land Uses**

Wildlife, especially nesting geese,
swans and sandhill cranes
Walrus

Main Communities

[Coral Harbour](#)

Aboriginal Peoples

Inuktitut

Parks and Natural Areas

East Bay Bird Sanctuary

Further Information

[Coral Harbour wikipedia](#)

