

37

Eastern Arctic Lowlands

Not represented: Lands are reserved for a national park on northern Baffin and Bylot Islands



Seabird colony, Prince Leopold Island

**GLORIOUS IT IS IN
WINTER HERE!**

And yet there is only
One great thing,
The only thing,
To live to see in huts and
on journeys
The great day that dawns
And the light that fills
the world.

*Song recorded by the Fifth
Thule Expedition, 1924*



Hoodoos, Baffin Island

THE LAND:

In this region, sedimentary strata overlie Precambrian bedrock, resulting in low-lying plains and smooth plateaux, especially in the southern portions: “[the coast] is simply a ribbon of granite rising just above the high tide contour, at low water hemmed by

... a rocky tidal flat with a sprinkling of granite isles and reefs.... It was a desolate shore.... There seemed to be no elevations even 50 feet within a dozen miles of the coast.” These were the words of explorer George Putnam in 1928.

Tidal flats over 10 kilometres wide are festooned with “growlers” and ice floes, sculpted into mushroom-like shapes by tide-driven waters. The two largest lakes in the Arctic Islands, Nettilling and Anadjuak, lie in the middle of the lowlands of southwestern Baffin Island. Inland is a flat country of marshy plains interspersed with bare rock, ponds and lakes.

The northern portions of the region present a contrast to the horizontal coastline and sodden lowlands of the south. The land rises abruptly to a high plateau. Several spectacular fiords slash inland, with sheer cliffs rising over 1,000 metres.

The climate is bitterly cold, with overcast conditions prevailing much of the time. Precipitation is limited, creating desert conditions.

VEGETATION:

Vegetation is sparse, dwarfed and starved, particularly in the northern part of the region. Well-drained sites support a discontinuous cover of low-growing herbs and shrubs - sedges, saxifrages, willows, mountain avens and arctic poppy are typical. In the southern lowlands, wet meadows of sedges, cottongrass and moss cover large areas.

WILDLIFE:

Although parts of this region support little wildlife, some areas are especially prolific. Large numbers of caribou, wolf, arctic fox, wolverine, collared lemming and arctic hare are found in fertile areas of the land and sea. Polar bears use the coastal areas for winter denning and spring seal hunting.

The wet lowland meadows adjacent to Hudson Bay and Foxe Basin and the lake-studded coastal plain of western Baffin



King Eider

Island provide the most important habitat for waterfowl in the entire Arctic. The largest goose colony in the Arctic is found here, on the Koudjuak Plain. Over one million lesser snow geese, Canada geese and

brant nest and feed on the marshy sedge tundra of the plain in summer. King eider, common eider, oldsquaw and brant are the most abundant nesting species.



Oliver Sound

STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

Under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, signed in 1993, Government and Inuit are negotiating an Inuit Impact and Benefits Agreement to formally establish a national park on Northern Baffin Island and Bylot Island - the North Baffin proposal. It is expected that these negotiations will be concluded in 1997. In the meantime, the lands have been protected for a future national park under the Territorial Lands Act.

The scenery of the proposed park is impressive: sea cliffs over 300 metres, glaciers dropping into the sea, high mountains and some of the world's most spectacular fiords. The concentration of marine mammals and birds in the area is even more remarkable. Several huge cliff colonies of seabirds are found along the coast of Lancaster Sound and northern Baffin Island, including a colony of over 400,000 thick-billed murrelets, along with black-legged kittiwakes, arctic terns and northern fulmars. Bylot Island, within the national park

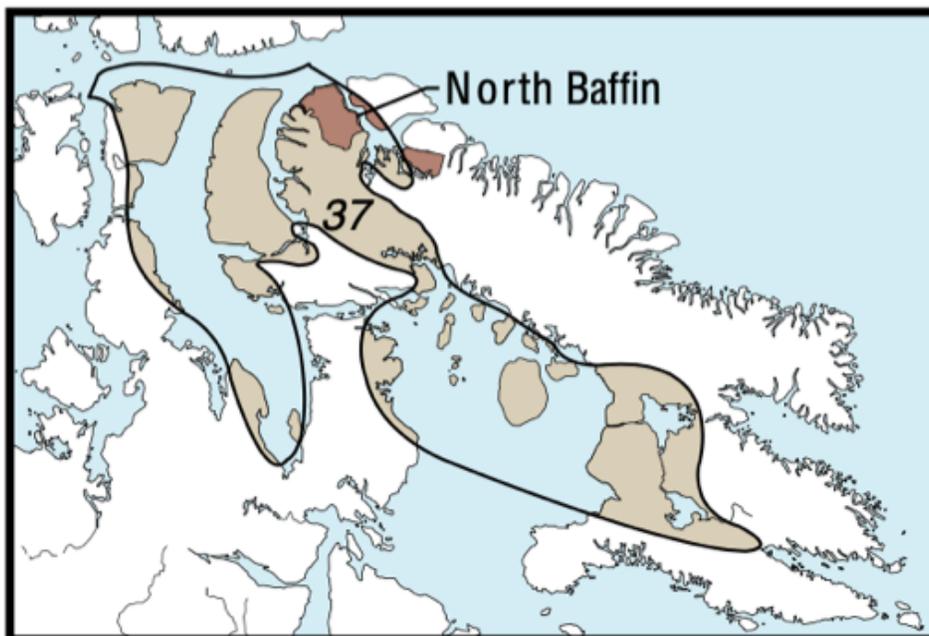
Natural Region 37

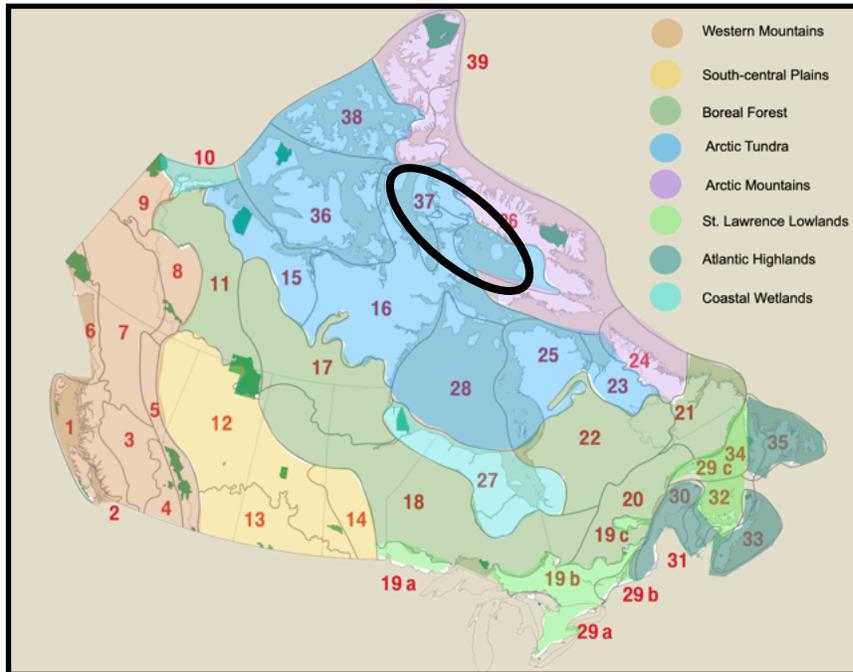
proposal, supports about 35 percent of the world's breeding population of greater snow geese. In the waters adjacent to the proposed national park area, narwhals, belugas, walrus, polar bear and five species of seal (harbour, hooded, bearded, harp and ringed) abound. The rare bowhead whale regularly frequents Lancaster Sound.

Given the spectacular combination of terrestrial and marine resources here, Parks Canada had initially presented local people with the idea of a large park combining both land and marine elements. This idea was rejected and consultations focussed on the land area only, with the idea that it may be appropriate in the future to reconsider an adjacent marine protected area.



Prince Leopold Island





Major Land Uses
 Seabird nest sites, especially Prince Leopold Island

Main Communities
 Iqaluit

Aboriginal Peoples
 Inuktitut

Parks and Natural Areas

Further Information

