

Swan Lake Wildlife Refuge

Waterfowl and shorebirds use the lake as a staging area during spring and fall migrations, when the water becomes crowded with up to 15 different species of busy ducks, noisy coots and squawking grebes. Tundra Swans sometimes visit, while Marsh Wrens, Red-wing and Yellow-headed Blackbirds argue about nest sites in the bulrushes. Violet-green and Tree Swallows curve through the skies, and on hot summer days Western Painted Turtles sunbathe on floating logs.

The many nest boxes have attracted the two species of bluebirds, and the liquid calls of the males can be heard as they dash from tree to bush like bits of blue sky. Western Meadowlarks carol from fence posts, while Vesper Sparrows sing loudly to proclaim their territories. Red-tailed Hawks cruise the skies and Kestrels patrol for grasshoppers. All these species rely heavily on grasslands.

Mule Deer, White-tailed Deer and Elk graze as the undulating hills turn green in spring, while a heavy population of Pocket Gophers provides rich feasting for hawks and coyotes. As you stroll along the nature trails you may see the occasional Black Bear or find yourself being serenaded by coyotes on the rim of the basin.

Five kilometres of self-guiding nature trails provide access to hikers and help them to avoid treading on the fragile grasslands. Two bird blinds located near the lake offer a welcome stop for birders who wish to view the activities of waterfowl and shorebirds.

For further information and for bird and plant checklists, please visit our website:

VFFN.ca

email us at:

vffnbc@gmail.com

or by writing to:

Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists
Box 2074, Princeton, BC V0X 1W0



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THE GRASSLANDS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ARE A JUSTLY FAMOUS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND YOUR BEST OPPORTUNITY TO INVESTIGATE THIS WONDERFUL HABITAT IS BY STROLLING THROUGH THE SWAN LAKE REFUGE NEAR PRINCETON, B.C.

CREDITS:

Photographs: Cora Cherry, Arlene Marsel
Madelon Schouten, Paul Wylie

Text: Madelon Schouten

Editing: Janis Wright

Trail Statistics: Blaine Marsel

Layout & Production: Cora Cherry

The Swan Lake Wildlife Viewing and Habitat Restoration Project is located two kilometres north of the Town of Princeton, on the Princeton-Summerland Road just past the Princeton Exhibition Grounds. A blue and white nature sign on the left indicates the entrance.

The lake is located in a kettle, a deep depression created by glacial action about 12,000 years ago, as the mile-high glaciers over this area began to retreat. The lake is surrounded by open rangeland dotted with huge Ponderosa Pine. The 57 hectares of rolling grassland is home to an abundance of native flora and unfortunately, to many introduced species.

In the early portion of the 20th century the area was used as a holding ground for cattle awaiting shipment to market, so it was severely abused. Some cattle were allowed to graze there until 1985. As well, motorized vehicles criss-crossing the area have left tracks that, in this dry habitat, take decades to disappear, and this traffic has aided in the spread of noxious weeds, such as Knapweed.

Since 1985 cattle have not been allowed to graze and vehicles have been restricted, so the grasslands have been recovering and many wildflowers have returned. Sagebrush Buttercups cover the ground in early spring, followed by the delicate white flowers of the Western Spring Beauty and the Yellow Bells. Many other blooms flourish in May, June and July.

Of the 254 species of birds that have been recorded in this region, 130 have been tallied for the Swan Lake area, some as nesting residents and others as migrants.

