

**CANADA 14: MCCONNELL RIVER MIGRATORY BIRD
SANCTUARY,
NUNAVUT TERRITORY**

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

Effective Date of Information: The information provided is taken from the List of Canadian Wetlands Designated as of International Importance, May 1982 and updated by the Canadian Wildlife Service – Prairie and Northern Region in October 2001.

Reference: 14th Ramsar site designated in Canada.

Name and Address of Compiler: Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Suite 301, 5204 50th Avenue, Yellowknife, N.W.T. X1A 1E2.

Date of Ramsar Designation: 24 May 1982.

Geographical Coordinates: 60°50'N., 94°20'W.

General Location: Located about 27 km south of Arviat on the west coast at Hudson Bay in the Nunavut Territory.

Area: 32 800 ha.

Wetland Type (Ramsar Classification System): *Marine and coastal wetlands:* Type D - rocky marine shores; Type G - intertidal mud, sand and salt flats; Type H - intertidal marshes. *Inland wetlands:* Type O - permanent freshwater lakes; Type Sp - permanent freshwater ponds, marshes and swamps; Type Vt - tundra wetlands.

Altitude: Range is from sea level to 20 m.

Overview (Principal Characteristics):

Physical Features (Geology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Soils, Water, Climate): The flat, low-lying and poorly-drained plain is dotted with shallow ponds and lakes with an average depth of 1 m and is typical of much of the west Hudson Bay coastline.

Ecological Features (Habitats, Vegetation): Land cover mapping (ground truthing of satellite images) was completed in 2001 for the sanctuary and areas north and south along the coast.

Tenure:

(a) **Site:** Fee simple title to this sanctuary is held by the Inuit of Nunavut Territory.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** Federal Crown land.

Conservation Measures Taken: The sanctuary was established in 1960 and is protected under the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations that stem from the *Migratory Birds*

Convention Act of 1917. Under Article 9 of the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*, the sanctuary remains subject to the regulations of the *Act*.

Conservation Measures Proposed: The area is subject to comanagement agreements under the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*. The boundaries of the sanctuary are under review and may increase.

Current Land Use/Activities in:

(a) **Site:** Hunting, trapping and fishing by the local Inuit of the community of Arviat continue on this land. Land use permits are issued by the Canadian Wildlife Service under the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations and by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada under the Territorial Land Use Regulations for the area. Sporadic Snow Goose surveys are conducted and grazing and habitat studies are underway. Screening of projects under the Nunavut Impact Review Board is undertaken with certificates issued by the Nunavut Planning Commission. Permission is required to gain access to Inuit-owned land.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** Territorial Land Use Regulations are in effect on federal Crown land. Hunting, trapping and fishing by Inuit of the community of Arviat continue on this land.

Threats to Integrity of:

(a) **Site:** Habitat degradation is occurring due to an increase in the Snow Goose population.

(b) **Surrounding Area:** There are no immediate threats to this area.

Hydrological/Physical Values:

Social/Cultural Values:

Noteworthy Fauna: The colony of Lesser Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens* in the area has undergone rapid growth. The first report of nesting in the area was in 1941 and by 1973 the number had increased to over 163 000 nesting pairs. The colony has now spread beyond the boundaries of the sanctuary. Substantial numbers of the tall grass prairie population of Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* also nest in the sanctuary. Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*) populations have also increased dramatically.

Noteworthy Flora:

Current Scientific Research and Facilities: McConnell River was the site of extensive studies on the biology of geese and other Arctic species in the 1960s and 1970s. Population levels of breeding Lesser Snow Geese and Ross' Geese are regularly monitored.

Current Conservation Education:

Current Recreation and Tourism:

Management Authority:

Canadian Wildlife Service
Environmental Conservation Branch
Environment Canada
P.O. Box 1714
Iqaluit, Nunavut
X0A 0H0

Jurisdiction: Private - Nunavut Inuit.

Selected Bibliography:

- Ankney, C.D. 1974. The importance of nutrient reserves to breeding Blue Geese *Anser caerulescens*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Unpublished. 213 p.
- Cooch, F.G. 1958. The breeding biology and management of the Blue Goose *Chen caerulescens*. Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University. Cornell, New York. Unpublished. 235 p.
- Davis, R.A. 1972. A comparative study of the use of habitat by Arctic Loons and Red-throated Loons. Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Unpublished. 290 p.
- Harwood, J. 1974. The grazing strategies of Blue Geese *Anser caerulescens*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Unpublished. 186 p.
- Kerbes, R.A. 1975. The nesting population of Lesser Snow Geese in the eastern Canadian Arctic: a photographic inventory of June 1983. Report Series, No. 35. Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa, Ontario. 46 p.
- Lief, B.C. 1973. The summer feeding ecology of Blue and Canada geese at the McConnell River, NWT. Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Unpublished. 203 p.

Reasons for Ramsar Designation: The area is major summer nesting habitat for several species of migratory birds including Lesser Snow Goose *Chen. Caerulescens*, Ross' Goose *Chen rossii*, and Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*. Up to 200 000 birds colonize this site annually.

Status of Management Plan: As part of the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*, a management plan for this area is required within five years of the declaration of the new Nunavut Territory in 1999.