Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary

Established in 1927 for its significance as a migratory bird stopover, Cootes Paradise is RBG’s largest and most diverse sanctuary at over 600 hectares. The area features a 320-hectare river-mouth marsh, 16 creeks and 26 kilometres of shoreline. Spencer Creek is the largest entry at the western end. Large Red and White Oak trees dominate the surrounding forest canopy.

MAJOR ACCESS POINTS

Princess Point — Princess Point is a natural gathering place and trail hub. It includes a canoe launch to the marsh and access for ice skating, as well as connections to six kilometres of nature trails and Hamilton’s Waterfront Trail. Princess Point is undergoing restoration to return it to its pre-European roots as mixed prairie and oak savannah.

Arboratum — The Arboratum is a hub leading to more than 10 kilometres of RBG trails, as well as many horticultural collections including lilies, magnolias, flowering dogwoods and the Avenue of Trees. It is also home to RBG’s Nature Interpretive Centre.

Burlington Heights — At the eastern edge of Cootes Paradise overlooking the water, this 30-metre-high ribbon of land is actually the beach of glacial Lake Iroquois formed 13,000 years ago. The area provides some of the finest views in the region. Until the 1840s, Cootes Paradise Marsh flowed around the north end of the Heights but rail construction required the cutting of a new outlet and the Desjardins ship canal was rerouted. During construction the bones of common eel were found.

What’s in a Name? — The site is named after Captain Thomas Cootes, a British army officer who enjoyed hunting the abundant waterfowl while on leave from his duties at Niagara in the 1780s. The community at the west end of the marsh was also named Cootes Paradise until the 1840s, at which time the name was changed to Dundas.

Early Residents — People have been drawn to Cootes Paradise for centuries. From AD 500 to 1000 this area was occupied by the Princess Point people, named after archaeological discoveries which indicated they were the first to bring agriculture to the region. The Attawandaron Nation existed into the 1600s, followed by Haudenoaunee and Anishinabek. Europeans arrived in the 1700s and one of the first homesteads, Raspberry House, remains today.

Vegetation and Microclimate — Nestled between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario, the area’s flora is characteristic of the more southern deciduous forest region. Carolinian trees such as Sassafras, oaks and Hickories dominate the North Shore, while northern species like Hemlock, Beech and White Cedar are found on the South Shore.

Habitat Restoration — At the inception of Project Paradise in the 1990s, nearly the entire marsh ecosystem had been lost, leaving it a shallow muddy lake. With the exclusion of destructive carp at the Fishway, water lilies, cattails, frogs, fish and birds have begun to thrive again.

**Royal Botanical Gardens**

**Mission**

We dedicate our expertise in horticulture, conservation, science and education to connect people, plants and place for the purpose of nurturing and preserving healthy growing life on our planet.

**Canada’s Biodiversity Hot Spot**

Royal Botanical Gardens’ 1,700 hectares is dominated by nature sanctuaries enveloping the western end of Lake Ontario. These form a Nodal Park within the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO) and the heart of the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System. With more than 750 native plant species, 277 types of migratory birds, 37 mammal species, 14 reptile species, 9 amphibian species and 68 species of Lake Ontario fish, the area is an important contributor to ecosystems that span international borders.

**Trail Conditions (AODA)**

Nature trails are classed as Wilderness Trails. Trails defined as ‘hilly’ have elevation changes of 20 metres with 20% grades in sections. Trails are generally 2-metres wide, expect for “narrow” trails that are 1-metre wide, and have cross slopes of less than 5% for drainage. Trails are not plowed or sanded during the winter. During spring thaws and after rain earthy trails become muddy. Please take appropriate caution.

**Liability**

RBG assumes no responsibility for loss of or damage to property, personal injury or mishap. All activities are at the risk of the participant. Our parking lots are not monitored. Do not leave any valuables in your car.

**Volunteer**

Volunteers help us on our trails and in our natural lands in a wide variety of ways. If you’re interested in learning more about our conservation, trail ambassadors, TrailWatchers or bird census teams, we’d love to hear from you. rbg.ca/volunteer

**Learn More**

Guided educational outings are offered year-round and include everything from wildflower walks to birdwatching and photography workshops. External groups charging for independently guided tours must register with RBG and are subject to our self-guided admission rate. For information call 905-527-1158, ext. 270.

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**Cootes Paradise Flowers**

**Round-lobed Hepatica** *(Anemone americana)*

This spring ephemeral is one of the first flowers to bloom. This small forest species can be found throughout the property and is one of two hepatica species present within the sanctuaries.

**Wild Geranium** *(Geranium maculatum)*

Blooming from spring to mid-summer, this flower is sometimes called Cranesbill—because of a long column that protrudes from the flower—a part of the plant’s explosive seed capsule.

**Pale-leaved Sunflower** *(Helianthus strumosus)*

This mid-summer, brightly-coloured sunflower prefers dry sandy soils on sunny open slopes. It is one of several species of native sunflower found on the property.

**Turtlehead** *(Chelone glabra)*

Look for this plant in wet areas along Captain Coote’s Trail in the late summer. The upper segment of the flower curves over the lower segment making it look like the head of a turtle.

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**Hours**

- RBG Centre — 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., April to Thanksgiving
- 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thanksgiving to late April (680 Plains Road)
- Trailheads — 8 a.m. to dusk. Metered parking at trailhead lots. Parking is free to RBG members (display Parking Pass).
- Arboratum — 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.; regular admission fees apply during spring bloom festivals and open hours may be extended.

**Membership — Passport to the Paradise**

Membership is one of many ways to support RBG’s sanctuaries. Nearly all of the operational RBG’s gardens is raised through memberships, donations and admissions. How much is a nature sanctuary in your backyard worth to you? Purchase your membership today and receive free parking at our trail heads.

Challant registration #135300585 RS 0001
A private landowning agency providing public access to the environment.

RBG Centre, 680 Plains Road West
Burlington, ON L7T 4H4
905-527-1158 • www.rbg.ca

**Also In This 2023 Map Series:**
- Hendrie Valley
- Escarpment Properties
- Princess Point
- Pine Point Lookout
- Marsh Boardwalk/Spencer Creek Delta
- Princess Point
- Marsh Boardwalk/Spencer Creek Delta

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**Cootes Paradise**

**Trail Guide**

**Part of the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve**

**Links to the Bruce and Waterfront trails**

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Royal Botanical Gardens is within the Traditional Territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Huron-Wendat Nations, on land covered by a Treaty between the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Crown.

Les Jardins botaniques royaux se trouvent à l’intérieur des territoires traditionnels des nations Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe et Huronne-Wendat, sur des terrains couverts par un traité entre la Première Nation des Mississaugas du Credit et la Couronne.

Cootes Paradise Trails
17 km of trail, 13 lookouts
6 boardwalks, 8 creek crossings

North Trails
• Anishinaabe waadiziwin — 1.3 km, 2 m wide, hilly
• North Shore Landing — 0.6 km, 2 m wide, hilly
• Captain Cootes — 0.4 km, 2 m wide, hilly
• Bull’s Point — 1.5 km, 2 m wide, flat
• Homestead — 2.0 km, 2 m wide, flat
• Hickory Valley — 0.7 km, 2 m wide, hilly
• Grey Doe — 1.0 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• Hopkins Loop — 1.3 km, 2 m wide, flat
• Marsh Walk — 0.7 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• Native Trees — 1.0 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• See Trail Conditions (AODA) note

South Trails
• Desjardins Trail — 1 km, flat, paved, accessible
• Churchill Park — 2 km, flat, gravel, accessible
• Princess Point Trail — 2 km, 1–2 m wide sections, hilly
• Ginger Valley Trail — 1 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• Ravine Road Trail — 1.5 km, 3 m wide, hilly
• Sassafras Point Trail — 1 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• Caleb’s Walk — 0.5 km, 1 m wide, hilly
• See Trail Conditions (AODA) note

Trail Code
These lands are part of Canada’s biodiversity hot spot, open to passive recreation — leave only footprints, take only pictures. Garbage receptacles located at trailheads.

Restrictions (per RBG’s bylaws):
• Pats must remain leashed at all times
• Running/jogging and cycling are not permitted
• Motorized vehicles are not permitted
• Feeding the wildlife is not permitted
• Smoking is not permitted

Special Protection Areas
Though the property spans more than 1,100 hectares, urban encroachment has left few true sanctuaries for sensitive species. To ensure that all species have an opportunity to thrive, 20 per cent of the property is set aside as Special Protection Areas (SPA) closed to the public. There are observation points and interpretive signage adjacent to the SPAs to help visitors understand the significance of these unique spaces.