

Cootes Paradise



Cootes Paradise is a 600-hectare wildlife sanctuary highlighted by a 320-hectare river-mouth wetland. It is located within the crest of the Golden Horseshoe, at the western tip of Lake Ontario separated from the lake by a historical glacial beach called Burlington Heights, and surrounded by the Niagara Escarpment. The wetlands surrounding old growth forest supports a wide variety of plants and animals including rare and threatened species. Its location makes it an important migratory bird stopover and as a result the area became a formal sanctuary in 1927.

The sanctuary is also located at the transition between two major yet largely fragmented biomes—the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Life Zone and the Carolinian Life Zone. Historical landuse changes around the many inflowing rivers degraded the wetland and led a major ongoing restoration initiative – Project Paradise. Beyond the shelter of the adjacent Niagara Escarpment, Cootes Paradise is surrounded by agricultural, residential, industrial, commercial and recreational lands. Its urban location makes this sanctuary a vital link to other adjacent Niagara Escarpment UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve areas in the region including Spencer Gorge, Dundas Valley, Iroquois Heights

and Borer's Fall's/Rock Chapel. Cootes Paradise Sanctuary is designated a nodal park with the Niagara Escarpment system, and is also the last Escarpment to Lake Ontario link not bisected by a 400 series highway.

The wetlands 30,000-hectare watershed acts as the catchments for three main waterways: Spencer Creek the largest creek in the region, as well as Borer's Creek and Chedoke Creek. Many smaller streams also drain from the adjacent escarpment, including Delsey Creek, Westdale Creek, Long Valley Brook, Hickory Brook and Highland Creek. The Dundas Sewage Treatment Plant and four Combined Sewage Overflows (CSO's) - now greatly reduced by holding tanks, also discharge into the inflowing creeks.

Due to its scale and location, Cootes Paradise wetland is considered one of the most important migratory waterfowl staging habitats on the lower Great Lakes and the largest nursery habitat for fish in the region. The Government of Ontario has designated Cootes Paradise as a Provincially Significant Class 1 Wetland and an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). It also is listed as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) in the Hamilton Region. Other significant designations include IBA (Important Bird Area), IMPARA (Important Amphibian and Reptile Area) and National Historic Site.