

CANADA 15: DEWEY SOPER 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: 15th 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: 66°10'N., 74°00'W.

General Location: Located on Baffin Island about 275 km northeast of Cape Dorset in Nunavut Territory.

Area: 815 900 ha.

Wetland Type (Ramsar Classification System): *Marine and coastal wetlands:* Type A - marine waters; Type G - intertidal mud and salt flats. *Inland wetlands:* Type O - permanent freshwater lakes; Type Sp - permanent freshwater ponds, marshes and swamps; Type U - peatlands; Type Vt - tundra wetlands.

Altitude: Range is from sea level to 60 m.

Overview (Principal Characteristics): A broad coastal plain with a unique assemblage of circular shallow lakes, and peat dominated soils and marshes with scattered granitic rock outcrops in an otherwise slightly sloping surface underlain by calcareous bedrock.

Physical Features (Geology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Soils, Water, Climate): The Sanctuary includes about 250 km of a very low relief coastal section of the Great Plain of the Koukdjuak. The shoreline is strongly influenced by sea ice movement in the summer period. The Koukdjuak River drains into Foxe Basin immediately north of the sanctuary. Lack of relief on the plain, and high tides in Foxe Basin, combine to form a tidal zone which may extend up to 15 km inland. The Sanctuary has a fascinating array of surficial geomorphic features including chevron beach ridges and rare examples of high latitude karst solution formation. Significant peat deposits border large turbid circular lakes forming a very unusual northern landscape. The wide marshy plain is dotted with these shallow round lakes and circular infilled basins, and is drained by innumerable small sluggish streams.

Ecological Features (Habitats, Vegetation): Much of the area is covered with a mat of mosses and sedge *Carex stans*. Other common plants include *Alopecurus alpinus*, *Salix* spp., *Cochlearia officinalis* and *Saxifraga caespitosa*. Land cover mapping (ground truthing of satellite

images) was completed for the entire sanctuary in 2001 and the areas to the north, east and south.

Land Tenure:

(a) Site: Up to 1993, this area was federal Crown land. Ownership, land use and hunting rights are now governed by the outcome of land claim negotiations between the Inuit and the Government of Canada as part of the Nunavut Territory established in April 1999. The southwest corner of this area is held in fee simple by the Inuit of Nunavut.

(b) Surrounding Area: Federal Crown land and native lands as per the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*.

Conservation Measures Taken: The sanctuary was established in 1957. It is protected under the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations which 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: This area is subject to co-management agreements under the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*. The boundary of the sanctuary is under review and may increase.

Current Land Use/Activities in:

(a) Site: Hunting, trapping and fishing by local Inuit 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. 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 apply to federal Crown land.

Threats to Integrity of:

(a) Site: There are no imminent threats.

(b) Surrounding Area: There are no imminent threats.

Hydrological/Physical Values: The combination of several unique geomorphic and hydrologic features such as chevron beach ridges and circular lakes as well as karst features are likely of international significance.

Social/Cultural Values:

Noteworthy Fauna: The most abundant waterfowl species in the Sanctuary is Lesser Snow Goose *Chen caerulescens*, with about 1,500,000 nesting individuals recorded in the 1990s. Other numerous species are small Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* of the tall grass

prairie population, Atlantic Brent *Branta bernicla brota*, Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, and King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* and several species of shore birds. Cape Dominion is one of the most important nesting areas in the Eastern Arctic for Atlantic Brent. The Plain is summer range for a major barren-ground caribou herd.

Noteworthy Flora:

Current Scientific Research and Facilities: Population levels of breeding Lesser Snow Goose 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: Federal - Environment Canada; Native - as per the *Nunavut Land Claim Agreement*.

Selected Bibliography:

- Kerbes, R.H. 1969. Biology and distribution of nesting blue geese on Koukdjuak Plain, NWT. M.Sc. thesis, University of Western Ontario. London, Ontario. Unpublished.
- Kerbes, R.H. 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. Ottawa, Ontario. 47 p.
- Soper, J.D. 1946. Ornithological results of the Baffin Island expeditions of 1928-29 and 1930-31; together with more recent records. *Auk* 63: 1-24, 224-239 and 418-427.

Reasons for Ramsar Designation: The Sanctuary is a critical summer nesting area for up to two million migratory birds, particularly Lesser Snow Goose *Chen. caerulescens*, Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*, Atlantic Brent *Branta bernicla brota*, Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*. The area is a primary example of a rich Arctic coastal wetland plain. It is also habitat for one of Canada's major barren-ground caribou herds.

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.