

**SUMMER BIRDS OF ROLLEY LAKE PROVINCIAL PARK, 1985-1991**

by Al Grass  
Parks Division

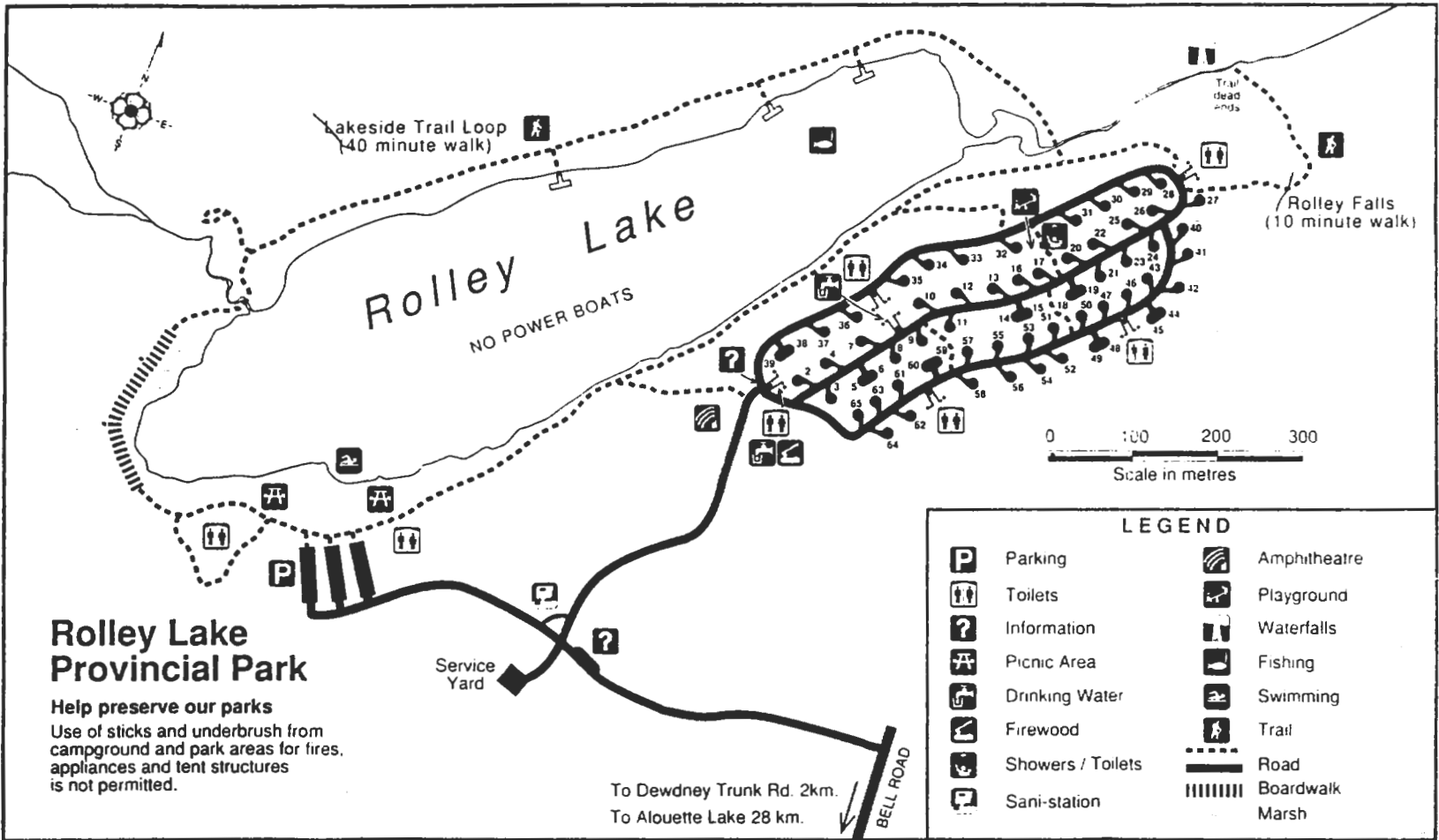
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**INTRODUCTION**

Rolley Lake Provincial Park (see Figure 1) is located 23 km northwest of Mission in the Lower Fraser Valley of British Columbia. It is wholly within the wet subzone (CWHb) of the Coastal Western Hemlock Biogeoclimatic Zone as defined by Krajina (1965). The forested land is classed as 55-year-old immature Hemlock/Douglas Fir and immature Hemlock/Red Cedar. This is a reflection of the logging and fire episodes of the 1920s and 1930s. Within these broad categories are site specific plant associations of importance to birds (Parkin and Gunville 1976). Broadly speaking, these are:

1. Mainly coniferous-- various combinations of western hemlock (Tsuga heterophylla), western red cedar (Thuja plicata), and Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii).
2. Mixed coniferous/broad-leaved-- mature broad-leaved species such as red alder (Alnus rubra) and bigleaf maple (Acer macrophyllum). This is a later seral stage in the progression of the forest from pioneer broad-leaved to mature coniferous. This is an important habitat for birds in the park because of its mixed nature.
3. Forest edges-- "edge" areas consisting of shrubby plant species. These are very important areas for birds because of the large number of fruit producing shrubs such as salmonberry (Rubus spectabilis), thimbleberry (Rubus parviflorus), and salal (Gaultheria shallon).
4. Riparian habitats:
  - a) Lakeshore riparian-- a mixture of shrubs such as willow (Salix spp.), sweet gale (Myrica gale), and Labrador tea (Ledum groenlandicum).
  - b) Streamside-- consists of red alder, ninebark (Physocarpus capitatus), and salmonberry. This key habitat is limited to areas such as the inlet creek (Rolley Creek).
5. Campground and day-use area-- listed separately because these are highly man-altered areas which attract certain birds such as the Steller's Jay and Dark-eyed Junco. Part of this attraction is simply the fact that campers feed these birds, either deliberately or inadvertently.

Figure 1. Map of Rolley Lake Provincial Park, B.C. (Courtesy of B.C. Parks Division.)



## 6. Aquatic habitats:

- a) Open lake-- shallow and deep. Inshore areas attract dabbling ducks, whereas deeper water is used by mergansers and loons.
- b) Stream-- independent of riparian vegetation and used by one species in the park, namely the American Dipper.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

I kept detailed records from 1985 to 1991, while I worked at Rolley Lake as a park naturalist. The first attempt to assess the park's birds was done in 1974 (Parkin and Gunville 1976). Contributions of data since then have been made by both park naturalists and visitors. Because I had no opportunities to do formal studies such as breeding bird surveys, the observations recorded are opportunistic and anecdotal. Nevertheless, the data provide some useful insights into the bird life of a fairly typical tract of young forest in the Coastal Western Hemlock Zone.

All uncredited observations listed in this article were made by the author. Other observers who provided some sightings quoted here include G.F. Gunville, Margaret Holm, Tom Parkin, and Wayne C. Weber.

## NOTE TO BIRDERS

May and early June are the best months to visit the park; by then the woods are full of warbler and vireo activity. The fen ("marsh") at the west end of the lake is by far the best birding site in the park. There is a 3 km trail that crosses the fen on a boardwalk and completely encircles the lake, taking the hiker through a variety of habitats and viewing opportunities.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Names and species order follow the "Checklist of British Columbia Birds" (Campbell 1989). Abundance (frequency of occurrence in suitable habitat) and seasonal status are modified from the "Checklist of Vancouver Birds" (Weber et al. 1990).

## TERMS FOR STATUS

Status refers to abundance during the breeding season, except for species noted as "transients". The number of records for each species per month from April through September is given in Table 1, along with the total number of records. This gives a reasonably good indication of the relative frequency of occurrence of each species.

**COMMON:** almost always seen, large numbers (25-100 per day).

**FAIRLY COMMON:** moderate numbers (5-25 per day).

**UNCOMMON:** often seen, but not every bird walk.

**RARE:** seen or expected only a few times a year.

CASUAL: to be expected less than once a year; somewhat outside the normal range of the species.

TRANSIENT: present only during migration periods.

### SPECIES LIST

1. COMMON LOON (Gavia immer), uncommon. Loons show up on Rolley Lake about mid-May and depart by early September. Both singles and pairs have been observed, but there is no evidence of breeding; they probably nest on other nearby lakes. They have often been observed catching trout (the lake is stocked with both rainbow and cutthroat trout).

2. PIED-BILLED GREBE (Podilymbus podiceps), rare. Two sightings: July 26, 1987 and July 29, 1988. Both observed at the west end of the lake, fishing for sticklebacks (Gasterosteus aculeatus).

3. GREAT BLUE HERON (Ardea herodias), uncommon. Single birds, usually seen fishing at the mouths of the major creeks around the lake.

4. CANADA GOOSE (Branta canadensis), uncommon. Small numbers (2-10) reside on the lake in summer. Skeins of 50+ birds have been seen flying over the park on fall migration, but these are not properly birds of the park. There is no evidence of breeding.

5. WOOD DUCK (Aix sponsa), rare. Female observed at west end of lake, August 9, 1991. There are other reports, but no dates supplied.

6. MALLARD (Anas platyrhynchos), uncommon. Small numbers (1-4), usually at west end of the lake. Pairs present but no evidence of breeding.

7. RING-NECKED DUCK (Aythya collaris), rare transient. One record, May 14, 1974 (Parkin and Gunville 1976).

8. COMMON MERGANSER (Mergus merganser), rare. Four sightings; no evidence of breeding. A female was observed with a 15 cm brown catfish (Ictalurus nebulosus).

9. OSPREY (Pandion haliaetus), uncommon. Ospreys arrive in early May, departing by late August. They nest on nearby Stave Lake, visiting Rolley Lake to fish for the stocked trout.

10. BALD EAGLE (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), rare. One adult, May 14, 1991. Numerous sightings in fall and winter.

11. SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (Accipiter striatus), rare transient. The only record is one, probably an early migrant, seen circling over the park on August 16, 1992 (W.C. Weber).

12. COOPER'S HAWK (Accipiter cooperii), rare. One flew over the day-use area, August 3, 1991.

13. RED-TAILED HAWK (Buteo jamaicensis), rare. Two sightings: August 4, 1989 and June 3, 1990. Much more common on logged-off areas near the park.

14. AMERICAN KESTREL (Falco sparverius), rare transient. A female observed perched on a dead tree, April 11, 1986.

15. BLUE GROUSE (Dendragapus obscurus), rare. Parkin and Gunville (1976) remarked that this species was "numerous". A record on June 23, 1991 of a hooting male was the first for many years at



Figure 2. Marsh and fen habitat at the west end of Rolley Lake.  
(Photo by Al Grass.)



Figure 3. Barred Owl, a breeding species at Rolley Lake Provincial  
Park. (Photo by Al Grass.)

Rolley Lake. Their scarcity at the time of writing marks an important change in the park's avifauna. This is probably related to forest succession, as Blue Grouse often prefer recently logged areas in summer.

16. RUFFED GROUSE (Bonasa umbellus), rare. Two sightings: May 14, 1985 and July 4, 1991 (drumming male).

17. SPOTTED SANDPIPER (Actitis macularia), rare. Observed on May 15, 1985 and August 3, 1991.

18. BAND-TAILED PIGEON (Columba fasciata), rare. Small numbers (1-2); no evidence of nesting, but they probably do.

19. GREAT HORNED OWL (Bubo virginianus), rare. One observed near park entrance on April 30, 1988.

20. BARRED OWL (Strix varia), uncommon. Nesting at least since 1988; young observed in 1988, 1989, and 1991. Remains of northern flying squirrels (Glaucomys sabrinus) were found in pellets (fur, skull, and bones). Most frequently heard and seen behind the service yard.

21. WESTERN SCREECH-OWL (Otus kennicottii), rare. One heard calling near the east end of the lake, June 8, 1990.

22. COMMON NIGHTHAWK (Chordeiles minor), uncommon. Small numbers seen hawking insects over the lake or campground.

23. BLACK SWIFT (Cypseloides niger), rare. Observed from July 19 to August 10, 1991.

24. VAUX'S SWIFT (Chaetura vauxi), rare. Sighted from July 15 to August 9, 1991. All five records were of 1-3 birds, hawking insects over the marsh.

25. RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD (Selasphorus rufus), uncommon. They arrive in early May when the salmonberry is in bloom, and seem to disappear by mid-July. The latest record is one on Aug. 16, 1992 (W.C. Weber). Perhaps the males leave after breeding to feed in sub-alpine areas, leaving the females to raise the young.

26. BELTED KINGFISHER (Ceryle alcyon), rare. Single birds except in 1988, when a pair was present and may have nested in a nearby gravel pit.

27. RED-BREASTED SAPSUCKER (Sphyrapicus ruber), uncommon. Observed most frequently on western hemlock, but also seen on white birch (Betula papyrifera), cascara (Rhamnus purshiana), bigleaf maple, and Douglas-fir. A juvenile was seen in the campground on September 1, 1991.

28. HAIRY WOODPECKER (Picoides villosus), uncommon. Generally distributed throughout the park; breeds here.

29. NORTHERN FLICKER (Colaptes auratus), uncommon. Parkin and Gunville (1976) commented that this species was "numerous"; this was not the case in 1985 to 1991.

30. PILEATED WOODPECKER (Dryocopus pileatus), uncommon. Sightings commonly on red cedar (stumps and standing trees). Close examination shows that the birds fed heavily on carpenter ants (Camponotus sp.).

31. OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (Contopus borealis), rare. Observed "perch-hawking" from a snag in the marsh with Willow Flycatchers.

32. WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (Contopus sordidulus), rare. Recorded in 1990, but not in 1991.

33. WILLOW FLYCATCHER (Empidonax traillii), uncommon. Arrive in mid-May, leaving by the end of August. Some were still heard







