

Atlin Park Lake Trip Report

A reconnaissance trip along the waterways of Atlin Park took place on May 19, 1977 with the following individuals involved: Wayne Campbell - Assistant Curator of Birds and Mammals at Provincial Museum, Heather Garrioch - Museum technician, Ervio Sian - photographer for Provincial Museum, Mike Phipps - operator of 20 foot motor launch and W. G. Hazelwood - Parks Biologist. The boat was a 20 foot launch rented at \$14 per hour.

The weather was sunny with intermittent small rain squalls and winds of 5 - 25 miles per hour in their storm fronts. This led to considerable difficulty in navigation in the open areas of the lake as the water became rough in a very short period of time. In the face of this aeolian adversity a route was chosen down Torres Channel, through the Second Narrows to Peggy's Island, thence to Llewellyn Inlet and Lake Inlet, then to Bird Island and over to Sloko Bay. The route back to Atlin was up the east side of the lake through Bastion and Griffiths Islands and Moose Bay, across to Teresa Island and then across to Atlin again. Almost the entire trip was accompanied by whitecaps created by the prevailing south winds over the upper lake area within the Park.

The purpose of the survey was to evaluate reported nesting colonies of herring gulls and Arctic terns on the small rocky islets of the Park. An investigation of lake-accessible goat ranges was also part of the purpose of the trip. The trip was moderately successful in accomplishing both aims in spite of weather and the early date.

The lake created a unique situation in the 1976-77 winter by remaining icefree for the first time in living memory. In a normal

year the lake would still have been partially frozen over on May 19 and thus necessitating a later survey date. No glacial runoff was evident even in the narrow feeder inlets at the toe of the glaciers. The water level was extremely low and many shoals were observed where none were expected. A marker on a shoal at the narrow neck between Atlin Mtn. and Teresa Island would increase the boating safety in this restricted corridor for future boaters using the Park waterways.

Wildlife

All wildlife observed in the Park was recorded on a site specific basis and thus will be so recorded here.

TORRES CHANNEL - Two golden eagles and one bald eagle were observed soaring in this area. Waterfowl seen were one male white-winged scoter and a pair of Arctic terns. Two grey jays, 2 red crossbills, 2 white-crowned sparrows and 4 tree swallows were also recorded along the west shores of Teresa and Copper Islands.

Mammals observed along the channel were 2 cow moose, one each on Teresa and Copper Islands. The Teresa sighting was on a slide fan which would also be excellent grizzly bear habitat. On Atlin Mtn., two nannies and one billy goat were observed as well as a black bear on the lower slopes all outside the Park boundaries.

SECOND NARROWS - This constricted waterway is a beautiful scenic protected route over to the open areas of the lake. At low water one can practically touch both shores at once but the water is deep enough in the sinuous channel to allow boats through. It is an



Teresa Island as seen from Atlin. Torres Channel on extreme right.



Teresa Island as seen from mouth of Lake Inlet at south end of Atlin Lake.

enticing area that lures the visitor to stay on and explore further the hidden waterways that constantly open up on either side. One well built cabin was observed at the eastern end of the narrows, apparently a trapper's cabin (P.U.P.?).

Fifteen herring gulls and two Arctic terns were observed in this waterway. Some evidence of goat was seen on the low cliffs of Copper Island where shedded hair clung to branches. A bank beaver also had a lodge located in the narrows along with evidence of their logging activities on adjacent aspen hillsides.

FIRST NARROWS - This waterway was not surveyed but it is apparently just as scenic as the above route but slightly narrower and shallower. It is located between Teresa and Copper Islands.

PEGGY'S ISLAND - This island was named after Peggy Milais, a local artist of Atlin, who spent an entire summer painting on this two acre island in the Park. For her avocation she had chosen her site well. Her paintings adorn the Atlin Hotel and Liquor Store in the town of Atlin.

Bluffs on the southeast side of the island and small islets adjacent to the south support nesting sites for herring gulls and Arctic terns. Other waterfowl observed here were a pair of harlequin ducks and a mew gull. A lesser yellowlegs, spotted sandpiper and a semi-palmated plover were also present along with a water pipit on the beaches. Other species found here were brown-headed cowbird, violet-green swallows, ruby-crowned kinglets, chipping sparrows, pine siskin, blackpoll warbler, myrtle warbler, tree swallow, Townsend solitaire, and a female blue grouse. A soaring bald eagle was also seen in the vicinity.



View south from Peggy's Island. Small islets in foreground have nesting herring gulls on rock outcrops above shoreline. Lake and Llewellyn inlets are in middle background straddling pimped hill.



Small islet south of Peggy's Island. Gulls nest on rock bluffs left side.

The only mammal evidence was a small "mouse" sighting above the shoreline cliffs where numerous holes were found under the spreading branches of a conifer. Winter pellets of both moose and caribou were found at the triangulation station located on the highest point of the island.

The observation of the female blue grouse is of speculative interest on a 2 acre island so far from other land areas. Was there a male present? How did she get there - over winter ice? No ice recorded this past winter. An artist's pet?!

LLEWELLYN INLET - This is a beautiful inlet leading up to the large glacier which is a mile or so inland from the head of the inlet. It is reported to have many shoals although none were evident during our trip. No birds were seen here but 4 goats were seen on the west side of the inlet and 2 on the east side. It is good goat habitat with broken terrain, open rocky areas with shrubby deciduous growth intermittent with the scattered coniferous forest.

LAKE INLET - Located immediately east of the above inlet it has more coniferous cover along the rocky hillsides and also more goat observations have been reported here (13 animals in 1976) on the west side. The channel is located on the west side of the bar across the mouth. Lake inlet is much the narrower of the two inlets.

One pair of common mergansers were flushed from the inlet waters and one golden eagle was also recorded. Three goats were observed high on the west side of the inlet. A lodge of a bank beaver was observed at the mouth of the inlet on the west side.

Interesting features are the purple and mauve rocks (cinnabar?) near the outlet and several nice camping areas at the outlet. The



Llewellyn Inlet. Grey line at base of far mountain is the Llewellyn Glacier.



Spring mountain goat range on west side of Llewellyn Inlet. Three goats in center of picture.

heads of the two inlets were undoubtedly united during higher waters of the past as low gravel flats connect through just north of the retreating glacier front. Either inlet would provide access to the glacier itself from the lakeshore.

BIRD ISLAND - This tiny island was actually the major focus of our trip. It is located just southwest of the entrance to Lake inlet. It is 15 feet high and approximately 100 by 80 feet in size. The higher levels were of dirt and grass with a rare shrub or two present. Reports from 5 years ago (Joe Florance) indicated that the island was a major nesting site for a colony of Arctic terns. Two years ago the same source stated that herring gulls were displacing the terns and were now occupying half of the island. Our trip inspection discovered that the gulls had taken over the entire island. Joe Florance also indicated that the displaced tern colony was nesting on several low islands in Sloko bay or inlet, and there were still approximately 200 birds involved with those islands. Birds observed on or near Bird Island were a water pipit, two immature Bonaparte's gulls, two common mergansers and 38 herring gulls.

A survey of nesting sites on the island revealed 26 nests. Seventeen were empty, 1 had one egg and 8 had two eggs. Since herring gulls typically incubate 3 eggs in a clutch they were obviously just starting to lay and incubation had not yet started. ~~This was supported by the lack of fuss over our presence there.~~ During incubation they would exhibit much more territoriality and concern over intruders. No mammals were observed on the island although the skeleton of a Northern pike was found on the rocks. This was likely scavenged from a distant shore or smaller and warmer

lake nearby to Atlin Lake. Otters have been reported at the south end of Atlin Lake and this predator may have had a large influence on the nesting birds (i.e. could herring gulls defend against an otter or mink where Arctic terns would fail?) of Bird Island.

SLOKO BAY - Weather and a shortage of fuel necessitated only a rudimentary inspection of islands in Sloko Bay. The low islands (2) were examined for Arctic terns but only one bird was observed. Since approximately 200 terns were reported here last summer by Joe Florance we can only project that (a) we were too early, (b) terns ^{will} no longer nest here, (c) our informant was in error, or (d) we did not find the right islands. I would support (a) and (d) above the other rationales for failure to locate the colony on our part.

Other birds seen near these islands were a pair of American widgeon, two pair of mallards, a water pipit, a golden eagle and a bald eagle. No landings could be affected due to the agitated waters so little is known of the use of the islands by any form of wildlife.

ISLANDS OF THE EASTERN SHORE - The small islets around Bastion Island and Griffiths Island were all examined in passing. Several herring gulls were seen but all were in flight. A potential waterfowl area of marsh and slough at the head of Moose Bay was not examined due to logistical constraints. Many of these small islands exhibited a remarkable lack of birdlife which was no doubt due to a later arrival of birds from the south.

Similarly, only a cursory inspection of the islands in Pike Bay was taken due to gas conservation and rough water. The return

trip to Atlin along the shore of Teresa Island was of a softer texture than the outgoing ride as the 20 mph wind was on our stern rather than in our face. No birds were observed until we walled past First Island where two Arctic terns, a mew gull and a herring gull were recorded. Duration of the trip was 8 1/2 hours.

One recommendation that has merit in safety and economy would be a cooperative purchase of a riverboat for the local Conservation Officer in Atlin by both Parks and Fish and Wildlife Branches. His 11 foot rowboat is of no value on Atlin Lake thus no patrols of the Park are possible, other than by charter. The high incidence of hunting in the Park by lake travellers warrants a Parks Branch investment of this sort. It would also then be available to Parks Branch for field trips into the Park by Regional and headquarters staff. A 24 foot-plus riverboat or at least a 20 foot launch are mandatory to handle this large lake in a safe manner. I urge both Branches to seriously consider this recommendation.


W. G. Hazelwood
Parks Biologist

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The help, cooperation and expertise of Wayne Campbell was greatly appreciated during this field trip for indeed it made the whole exercise possible. Mr. Joe Florance also freely gave his observations and knowledge of the lake and its wildlife to the study.

ATLIN PARK PROPOSAL BOUNDARY

--- ROUTE OF TRIP
x - MOOSE
9 - MTN. GOAT
8b - BLACK BEAR

SCALE IN MILES
15 10 5

