



Bird Island Natural Area

Bird Island Natural Area is a 226-acre island located within Malpeque Bay, Prince County, Prince Edward Island. The natural area includes all of Bird Island, which lies just southwest of Lennox Island First Nation. The Mi'kmaq name for Bird Island is Te'pljewe'katik, meaning “goat place” (Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, Traditional Use Map). Bird Island is considered sacred by the Mi'kmaq and a place for traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering.

Acquisition and Legal Status

Bird Island Natural Area was purchased on December 2nd 2002, with financial support in part from the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture, the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation, the EJLB Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, The McCain Foundation, and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The natural area was designated on July 15th 2004 under the *PEI Natural Areas Protection Act*.

Landscape Context

Bird Island Natural Area is surrounded on all sides by Malpeque Bay, lying on the north shore of PEI near Summerside and protected from the Gulf of St. Lawrence by a long chain of sandhills. Malpeque Bay is internationally recognized as both an Important Bird Area, by BirdLife International, and a Wetland of International Significance, under the RAMSAR Convention. The bay is an important stop-over location for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.

To the northeast of *Bird Island Natural Area* is Hog Island, the easternmost sandhill island in a chain that stretches from Malpeque Bay to Alberton Harbour. The Sandhills are considered a Mi'kmaw Heritage Landscape because of their cultural and spiritual significance to the Mi'kmaq people, their archaeological features, and their unique geological and ecological features. To the west of Bird Island is mainland PEI, and to the northwest is Lennox Island First Nation.

Geological Oddities

The southwestern point of Bird Island forms a “shingle beach”, which is a beach comprised entirely of pebbles – an uncommon sight on PEI, with its notably sandy shores. Another geological oddity of Bird Island are the glacial erratics that dot the shoreline. Glacial erratics are large boulders with a composition unlike the native surrounding rock; they were carried to their location by glacial ice and subsequently left behind when the glacier retreated. Most are grey or white in colour, in stark contrast to the usual red sandstone shale.



Glacial erratics on the shore of Bird Island



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Ecological Communities

One half of the *Bird Island Natural Area* is rich woodland while the remaining half is freshwater and saltwater marsh. The forested area of Bird Island is comprised of red maple, black spruce, balsam fir, trembling aspen, white birch, and sugar maple. There are also many large red oak and uncankered beech trees scattered throughout this forested section. The marshy areas on Bird Island provide important feeding and staging areas for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. *Bird Island Natural Area* is home to several provincially rare plants and is one of the only offshore islands in PEI that has never been cleared and farmed. Thus, it stands as an excellent permanent example of Maritime coastal mixed forest.

Many bird species have been observed using *Bird Island Natural Area*, including black-and-white warbler, yellow warbler, hermit thrush, hairy woodpecker, Cape May warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, red-eyed vireo, alder flycatcher, blackburnian warbler, great blue heron, lesser yellowlegs, green-winged teal, white-throated sparrow and ovenbird. Other wildlife observed in the natural area includes red fox and snowshoe hare.

Access

There are no marked trails in the *Bird Island Natural Area*, so anyone accessing the area should use a GPS unit or map and compass to navigate. *Bird Island Natural Area* can only be accessed by boat. The shingle beach on the southwest corner of the island provides a safe landing area for visitors. Approaching the southwest shore, one must pay close attention if travelling by motorboat. Aquaculture leases line the rivers and bay, and the lines keeping the oyster cages and mussel socks in place can easily go unseen, getting tangled in motor blades, potentially damaging both the boat and the lines. The waters immediately surrounding the island are also quite shallow for a good distance out from shore. Visitors should also be cautious of poison ivy, which grows vigorously along some of the banks of Bird Island. As with all of the nearshore islands owned by Island Nature Trust, there is no overnight camping.



A lesser yellowlegs on the shore of Bird Island.
Photo by Zack Metcalfe

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0.6km

DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, CNES/Airbus DS

The *Bird Island Natural Area* is represented in green in the map above.