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MEDIA RELEASE

Two New Biosphere Reserves Put Canadian Important Bird Areas in the International Spotlight

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(Ottawa) Thousands of hectares of critical bird habitat are now part of two new biosphere reserves in Canada. In September, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added Manicouagan Uapishka in Quebec and Fundy, New Brunswick to its World Network of Biosphere Reserves. These two reserves contain all or part of at least five internationally recognized Important Bird Areas (IBAs). UNESCO also approved a considerable expansion of Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve near Kingston, Ontario.

Biosphere reserves are “living laboratories” where conservation and sustainable land-use practices are intertwined. They are critical tools in helping us conserve global biodiversity. They also allow us to maintain healthy, natural ecosystems. These provide us with clean water, healthy soil, pest control and other services that are impossible to duplicate and without which we would not survive. At the same time, one of the basic functions of a biosphere reserve is to foster economic and human development that is ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable.

Extending from the St. Lawrence in the south to the Manicouagan Crater in the north, Manicouagan Uapishka is now Canada’s largest biosphere reserve. Included within its boundaries are boreal forest habitat, whale feeding grounds and the Baie Comeau Important Bird Area. Three bird species that are nationally at risk – the Harlequin Duck, Piping Plover and Short-eared Owl – have been recorded at this IBA.

Situated on the New Brunswick side of the uppermost reaches of the Bay of Fundy, the Fundy Biosphere Reserve’s mudflats and tidal marshes represent one of the most important staging sites for shorebirds in eastern North America. An estimated one to two million shorebirds congregate here before the fall migration. Sites such as the Shepody Bay West, Dorchester Cape and Grand Anse, and Upper Cumberland Basin IBAs are their last port of call before embarking on a three- to four-day non-stop flight over the Atlantic Ocean to South America. The Bay of Fundy’s rich feeding habitats are ideal for the birds, allowing them to build up the fat reserves they need for this marathon migration. An Important Bird Area is a site that provides essential habitat for one or more bird species. In 2001, Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada identified 597 IBAs in Canada using internationally agreed scientific criteria. The IBAs located inside Canada’s two new biosphere reserves provide critical habitat for approximately a dozen globally, continentally and nationally significant bird species.

UNESCO’s World Network of Biosphere Reserves spans 529 sites in 105 countries. The core area of each biosphere reserve is dedicated to the long-term protection of landscapes, ecosystems and species. Here, human activity is limited to research, monitoring and traditional activities by local people, such as hunting and fishing. Surrounding buffer zones and transition areas are used for sustainable tourism and other activities that promote protection of the core area.

Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada are Canadian co-partners in BirdLife International, a global alliance of conservation organizations working for the world's birds and people. With BirdLife partners in over 100 countries, we identify, conserve and monitor a worldwide network of sites that provide essential habitat for birds.

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