

Welcome to the wetlands of

North Creek

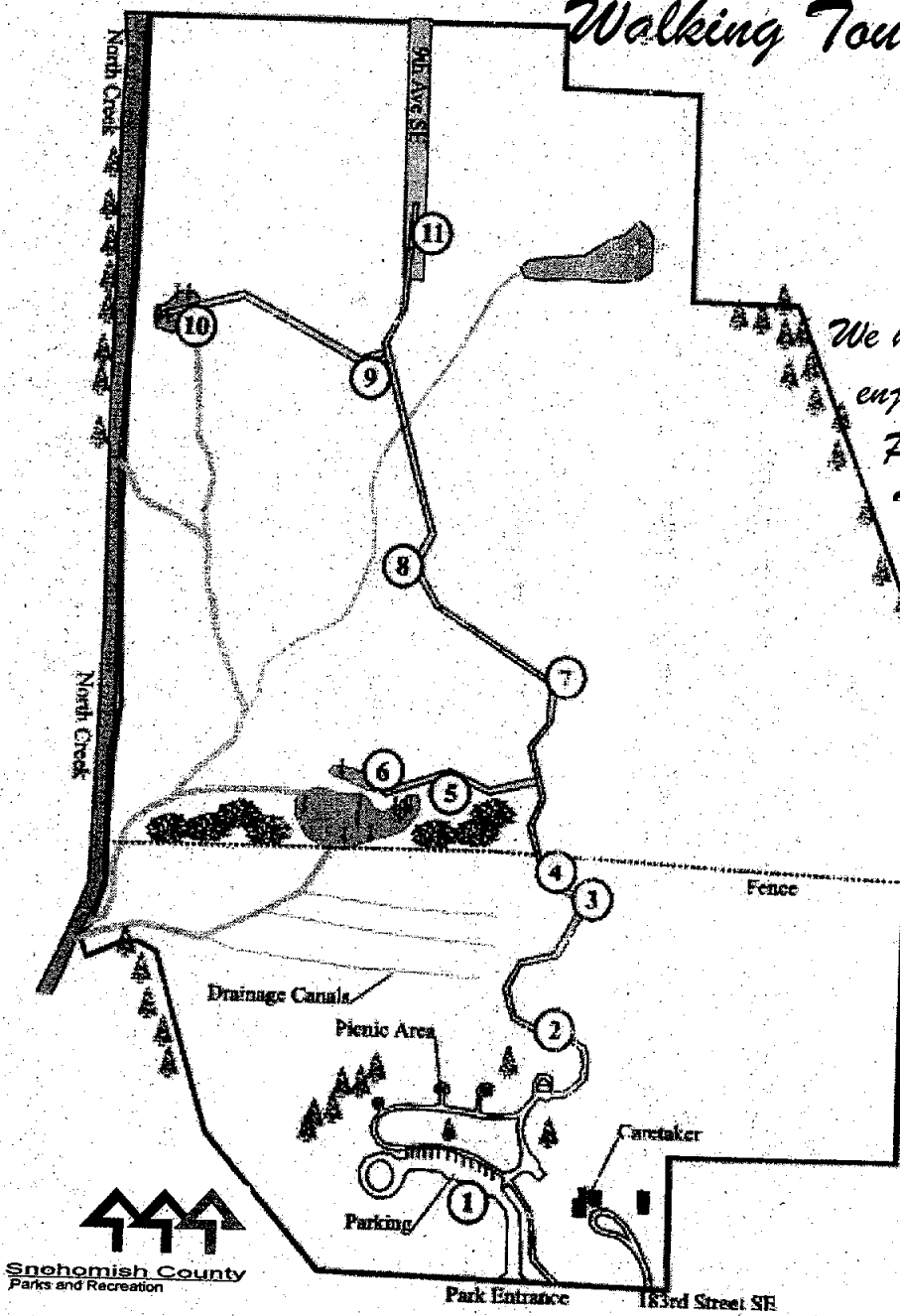
County Park



Pause at each of the eleven points of interest described in this tour guide and learn what is here -- how important this wetland has become for wildlife and flood control as the population of Snohomish County grows.

North Creek County Park

Walking Tour Locator Map

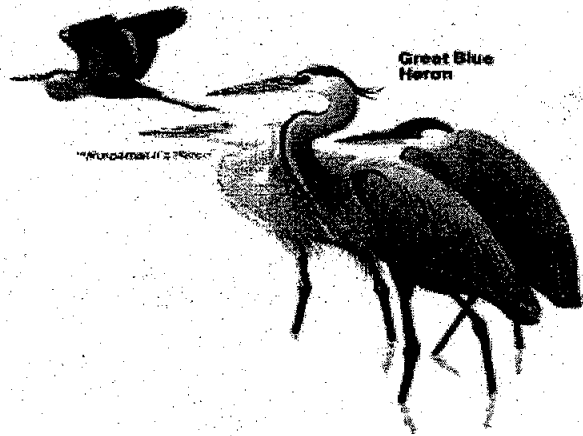


We hope you will enjoy North Creek Park again soon. There is always something new in store here -- as different wildlife drops in, as the seasons change.



North County Park
1011 183rd Street SE
Bothell WA 98012
425-744-0847

1. From the shelter, you can see almost all of the park. It extends north almost to the first buildings and to the east into the Alder woods on the hillside. You cannot see North Creek itself—it runs among the trees along the western boundary of the park. Watch for *Great blue herons* sitting up in trees that shade the creek. Many species of ducks and *Canada geese* can be observed flying into or leaving the ponds in the central part of the wetland.

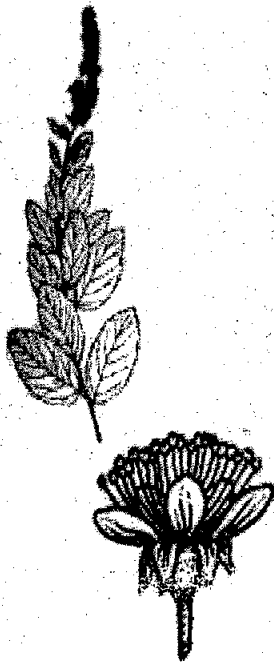


There are about 100 acres in North Creek Park, the middle part becoming a lake during a 25-year flood. A natural constriction at the southwest corner of the park drains this lake over the next day or two, protecting urban developments downstream from flash flooding. Between floods it does a more routine job, collecting and purifying surface water from a watershed extending as far north as Everett Mall Way.

2. As you step onto the boardwalk, notice the change in the vegetation—the wetland species in front of you are adapted to the water-logged soil technically known as "*Mukilteo muck*" (yes, really!), and behind you are the upland shrubs and grasses that grow on dryer, more oxygen-rich upland soils.

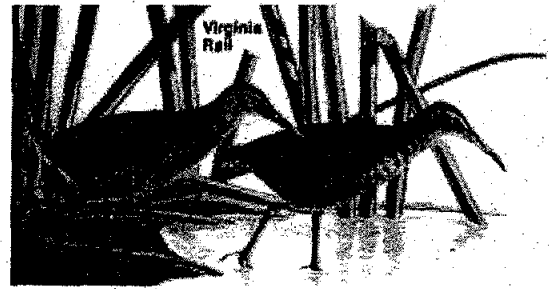


3. The next stop, at the "kidney sign," is a good place to see one of the most common plants in the wetland, *reed canarygrass*. This grass, which grows to a height of 6 feet in the summer, did not grow in the wetland a century ago, but like a third of the plant species here now, it was introduced during past uses of the land, such as livestock grazing and peat mining. Now that the wetland is not supporting these uses, we can expect an increasing diversity in the vegetation on the site and in the wildlife that depend on it.



4. As you walk into the area with dense shrubbery on both sides of the boardwalk, you will notice more surface water. *Douglas spirea*, or "hardhack," is the shrub that dominates this community and it grows throughout the wetland, mainly along the ditches that were made for drainage during the wetland's use as pasture.

The dense, intertwined branches make a popular habitat for birds such as the *song sparrow*. The sparrow is a plump bird with heavy streaks on its breast merging into a central spot. You may only hear its call, a series of three or four repetitious notes (sweet, sweet, sweet...).

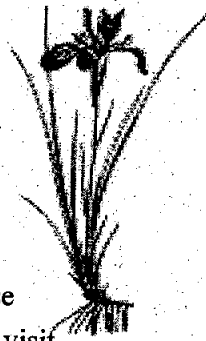


Turning left at the next boardwalk junction, and a short walk will take you to an old peat bog that has formed a typical, more recent wetland pond. If you hear a ground bird in the hardhack with a deep cackling laugh, it is the reclusive, seldom-seen *Virginia rail*. The Virginia rail is a hen-shaped bird with a rusty color and a long slender bill.

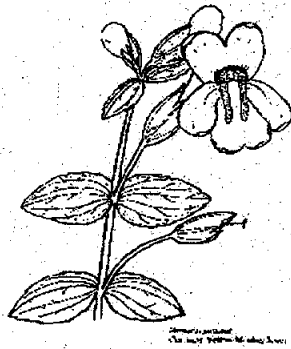


Another member of the rail family, the sora returns to large wetlands of western Washington to breed. Soras are small, gray birds with a black patch on their face and throat and short yellow beaks. Their song is a descending whinny. Watch carefully at the edges of the brush and you may be lucky to enough to see one.

5. Just before you get to the bog you may be able to identify the iris called *yellow water-flag*. There are several clumps of it within about 50 feet of the walk on the south side.



The flat leaves are similar to those of cattails, but are shorter. If you visit the wetland in May or June, you will have an easier time finding them by their bright yellow flowers.



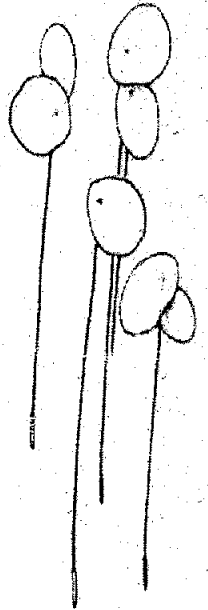
This section of the boardwalk is also a good place to look for the *yellow monkey-flower*. You will probably miss it unless you are here during the summer; then its small flowers will explain its name.

Small blue flowers called *forget-me-nots* also bloom in clusters along this branch of the boardwalk in the summer. Each flower has five flat, blue petals attached to an orange center.



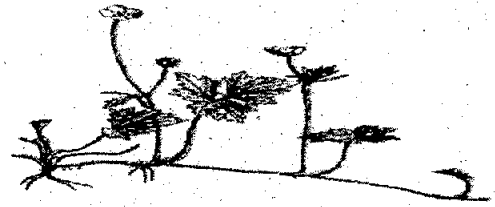
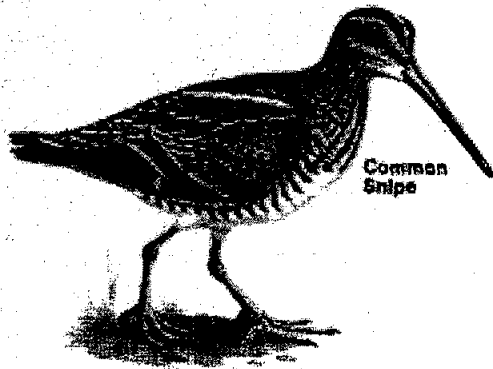
6. The bog is a favorite place for ducks and waterfowl. You can often hear them through the tall reed canarygrass and stands of cattail.

Duckweed, with its tiny, round leaves, sometimes covers much of this pond. It's a favorite forage of ducks and other waterfowl, as you might expect from its name.



If you are at the bog in the spring, look for what appear to be large masses of jelly with sticks or grass going through them. These are the egg masses of the *northwestern salamander*. The twigs help keep the egg masses in place.

In the winter, common snipes sometimes rest or forage in vegetation along this “bog pond” branch of the boardwalk. If you flush a brown, plump bird with short legs and a long bill, it is a *common snipe*.



After the sedge, you will come to an area of dark green foliage on both sides of the walk. Here is one of the most dominant stands of *creeping buttercup* in the park. In the summer its vast display of waxy, yellow flowers are visible even from the parking lot. It is well adapted to wetland conditions, but you may also find this robust plant as a weed in the wetter parts of your own yard.

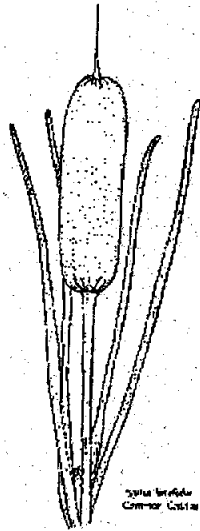
7. Back on the main boardwalk again and walking north, you will find *beaked sedge*—another example of plants that grow only in wetlands. You can identify beaked sedge by its three-sided blades and “wheat-heads” of brown flowers from April to July.



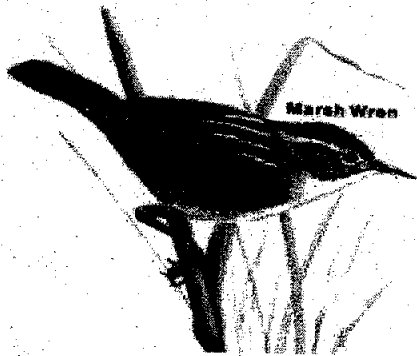
The reed-like clumps with round stems that compete for space among the buttercup are *soft rush*, another plant that thrives throughout this wetland, and one that adapts to drier soils as well.



8. At the next sign there is a thick patch of *cattail* close to the boardwalk. A stand like this is particularly important in urban wetlands because of the cattail's exceptional water purification properties.



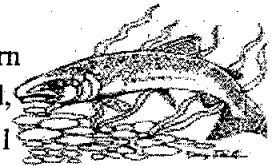
The *marsh wren* is the most common bird heard year-round in the park, and especially here in the cattail. Listen for the rattling call of this feisty little bird that sounds somewhat like a sewing machine. Wrens are difficult to see, as they hide in the cattails, but in the spring the males are perched, singing, on top of the cattails.



Also be on the lookout here for *red-winged blackbirds*. One of the earliest signs of spring is the male, calling "konk-la-ree" from the tops of cattails to claim his territory and win a mate. The female red-winged blackbird is dark brown above and heavily streaked below—not a "blackbird" at all!

Take a left turn at the next boardwalk junction, to the beaver pond, and you will approach North Creek itself. (Don't expect to see an actual creek—its waters meander along many routes there.)

9 Just after you turn toward the beaver pond, notice the channel running under the boardwalk. This is *Nickel Creek* which joins *North Creek* near the southwest corner of the park. The new plantings here, on both sides of the walkway, are an effort to re-establish types of shrubs and trees that likely grew here before the land's use for agriculture. *Coho salmon* return to spawn in North Creek each fall and have even been seen in the smaller stream channels such as this one. Juvenile coho remain in the North Creek system an entire year before migrating to the ocean.



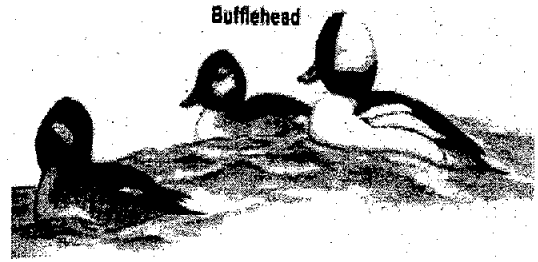


10. Witness the ongoing battle between man and beaver at the site of an old beaver dam on the western edge of the park. Man is channeling North Creek for his own purposes, generally in a straight line, and the *beaver* prefers to make ponds. This spot supports water-loving trees such as the *willow* and *red-twig dogwood*.



The snags you see beyond the end of the boardwalk are critical habitat for many cavity-nesting birds.

You can observe *violet-green swallows* and several kinds of woodpeckers here. *Northern flickers* are most common, but the large oblong holes in the dead trees were made by *pileated woodpeckers* (Woody Woodpecker) during their search to find carpenter ants and other insects.



11. Returning to the main boardwalk again, follow it to the north boundary of the park where the boardwalk gives way to a gravel path. There is a new beaver dam at the west end of the pond. Many duck species use the pond, including *mallards*, *gadwall*, *green-winged teal*, *American widgeon*, *northern pintail*, *redheads*, and *buffleheads*.

