

# Coburg Peninsula: The Shifting Sands of Time

## Don't stop here!

The other sign panels, at the south end of the lagoon, and on the Royal Roads University grounds, illustrate many birds and other species you may see here.

## How the Lagoon was Formed

When the last continental ice sheet retreated some 13,000 years ago, it left a large block of stagnant ice, insulated by overlying gravel. When the ice finally melted, it left a large depression that flooded with sea water to become Esquimalt Lagoon. Ocean currents, carrying sediments from glacial meltwater streams to the south of here, deposited sand and gravel forming the spit that you are standing on: the Coburg Peninsula. The spit is not stationary, but changes as the ocean currents continue to shape it.

**Mew Gull**  
Juvenile (left) & Adult (right)

**Dunlin**  
winter (left) & summer (right)

A Western Sandpiper may migrate 10,000 kilometers round trip, yet it weighs less than a golf ball.

**Harlequin Duck**  
Harlequin Ducks breed along turbulent mountain streams.

Brant move through on their spring migration, stopping along the BC coast to feed on eelgrass and other marine plants.

**Brant**

**Horned Grebe**

**Bufflehead**

**Beach Dunegrass**

**Western Sandpiper**

**Glaucous-winged Gull**

**Beach Pea**

**Sea Rocket**

**Gunweed**

**Black-bellied Plover**

**Least Sandpiper**

## Dune Plants

The spit is home to a special community of plants that can survive salt conditions, high winds, blowing and shifting sand, and seasonal water shortages. These plants make use of extensive root systems to anchor themselves in the sand, slowing down the erosion of the spit. This coastal dune community is one of the rarest assemblages of plants on Vancouver Island, so please treat it with care. Continuous trampling by humans and dogs weakens the hold that the plants have in the sand. As a result, they may be washed away by winter rains or storm surf. Native plant communities are also under threat from invasive, non-native species like Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry and garden exotics.

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## Help Protect the Beach Environment

- **Birds and dogs don't mix.** Coburg Peninsula is in the federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary and the beach is important bird habitat, especially for migrating waterbirds and shorebirds. Please keep dogs on a leash while in the Migratory Bird Sanctuary and never allow them to chase birds.
- **Watch your step.** Beach and dune habitats are very sensitive to trampling. Plants like native dune grass (*Elymus mollis*) can easily be destroyed when stepped on, and this can lead to dune instability. You can help dune conservation and restoration efforts by not walking through the dune habitats. Enter the beach only at the log-delimited access points.
- **Keep an appropriate distance from birds and other wildlife.** Wildlife are sensitive to disturbance by people and pets. Migrating birds need food energy to recharge for long flights and maintain their winter fitness. Interruption of their feeding by visitors to Coburg Peninsula can be very harmful. Please respect wildlife needs and keep an appropriate distance from them. If their behaviour changes as you approach, you are getting too close.