



Distance: 3.9 km



**Lake
Saint-François
National
Wildlife Area**



**LES AMIS DE LA RÉSERVE
NATIONALE DE FAUNE
DU LAC-SAINT-FRANÇOIS**
TSIIONTORATSHA

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This project was undertaken with the financial support of:

Environment and
Climate Change Canada
Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada



Picking plants and flowers,
among others, is forbidden
in the territory of the National
Wildlife Area.

8

Star of the marsh



photo : Jean De Marre

You're in one of the few places in southern
Québec where sandhill cranes nest. They usually breed
in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and Lac-Saint-Jean.
Couples mate for life and come back to the
Digue-aux-Aigrettes marsh with their young every year.
Within 24 hours of hatching, the chicks are capable of
leaving the nest
and flying with their
parents. Sandhill
cranes are very
well camouflaged
but can be easily
identified by
their red caps
and call.

9

Resident dinosaur?



photo : Chantal Leprie

Prehistoric-looking snapping turtles bask in the
sun on higher ground in the marsh to warm up.
They're the largest and most
primitive turtles found
in Québec. Every
spring, they leave
the protection of
the marsh to lay
eggs in the gravel
shoulders along
roads. All too
often, they're hit
by cars. So please,
be careful. This is an
endangered species in Canada.

10

Stealth flight



photo : Adobestock

Many species of birds of prey fly over the marsh
looking for rodents, birds and frogs, which abound
here. This includes the Northern harrier, recognizable
by the patch on its rump, where the tail meets the
body. See if you can spot one flying low, alternating
flapping with very long gliding phases. It will
undoubtedly surprise you by suddenly disappearing
before reappearing out of nowhere.

11

Watch your step

Take a look at the ground—you'll probably see some
northern leopard frogs. There are so many on this
trail, it's like being in a nursery! Considered the most
terrestrial of our frogs, a northern leopard frog can lay
up to 7,000 eggs in late spring.

Keep your distance

You may be tempted to approach some of
these wild species to observe them better,
but it's important to keep your distance at
all times. During nesting, for example, birds
are vulnerable. If parents are disturbed, they
may leave the nest and expose their eggs or
young to predators. On protected land, it's
important to respect the regulations
to preserve wild species and their habitat.



photo : Adobestock

Digue aux Aigrettes [egret dike] is an oasis for birds and offers a world of discoveries. You can observe many rare, magnificent species on this trail, including the sandhill crane. So, take the time to stop, observe and listen. You're in for a few surprises.

Before you set out on your adventure, please read the national wildlife area regulations.

1 Helping hand for nature

Have you noticed you're walking on a dike? It was built by the Canadian Wildlife Service in collaboration with Ducks Unlimited Canada to maintain the water level needed to sustain a marsh. The dike is also an excellent habitat for plants and wildlife. As well as being a breeding area and sanctuary for various species, it's teeming with food.

2 Tall white visitor

The great egret is easy to spot in these green surroundings. Its tall, white figure seems to shine in the marsh against the contrasting colours of the background. You can quickly identify this heron when it flies by its S-shaped neck. Incredibly patient, great egrets can stay still for a very long time waiting for prey. All summer long, they satisfy their appetites with frogs, fish, reptiles, small mammals and birds.



3 Remnant of glaciers

It's unusual to find a cedar grove in the heart of a marsh because these trees usually like dry soil. However, these conifers grow here because of a rare phenomenon—a moraine ridge formed by the accumulation of rock and sediment that was trapped, transported and deposited by the last glaciers. Since the ridge is high, it drains quickly, leaving the soil dry.



4 Regular visitors



With their green crest and colourful feathers, wood ducks are captivating birds. They can perch on branches—an unusual habit for ducks—and, being arboreal, they nest in tree cavities, which have become increasingly scarce. To rectify this problem, special nesting boxes resembling natural tree cavities have been installed for them. Keep your eyes peeled for these distinctive nesting boxes.

5 Spot the invader!

Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) is impossible to miss as it dominates the landscape. This alien species is considered invasive because it spreads very quickly and hinders the growth of other plants. Exotic common reed threatens the ecological balance of wetlands by producing litter that dries the soil and reduces the water level, thus affecting various plant and animal species.



6 Little snack?



The wild rice we eat is produced by the southern wild rice plant (*Zizania aquatica*). Native to eastern central North America, this grass was introduced in this marsh for the aquatic wildlife. Dabblers and Canada geese love the grains, as do smaller birds, such as buntings, red-winged blackbirds and soras.

Feathers everywhere!



Every July, thousands of feathers cover the ground. The reason? It's moulting season for ducks. For two to three weeks, they have to hide in the marsh from predators because they lose their wing feathers, which prevents them from flying! They regrow new ones at the end of the summer, just in time for fall migration.

7 Hard workers

Do you see the humps in the marsh? They're lodges built by muskrats from rushes and cattails. First, these rodents create a mound from vegetation and mud. Then, they make an entry hole under the water.



The final step involves strengthening the exterior walls with another layer of mud and vegetation. Muskrats can stay underwater without breathing for up to 20 minutes—a useful skill when it comes to building their homes.