

Conservation

The bedrock of Mitlenatch Island is a volcanic basalt that formed from lava. The large, light coloured granite boulders scattered here are glacial erratics and are especially noticeable. The origin of these boulders is the coast range in the vicinity of Bute Inlet.

This rocky island receives less than 75 centimetres (30 inches) of rain each year, about half of the Campbell River average (153 centimetres) and two thirds of the rainfall in Powell River (118 centimetres). This is due to the "rain shadow" effect from Vancouver Island where rain-bearing clouds passing eastward from the Pacific Ocean drop much of their moisture on Vancouver Island. As they descend across Georgia Strait they warm and pick up new moisture which will be dropped on the Coast Mountains of mainland British Columbia. This weather pattern creates an ideal climate for sun-loving plants, nesting seabirds, garter snakes and sun-seeking humans.

The shallow dry soils of Mitlenatch are not well-suited to trees. In the meadow, stands of shore pine are expanding their hold. In the upland area of West Hill a large stand of trembling aspen is a rather unusual feature. This species is not at all common on the coast but is very frequent in the British Columbia Interior. Arbutus, Douglas-fir, bitter cherry, Scouler's willow, black hawthorn and red alder are other trees species present in small numbers.

From late April onwards the parade of colourful flowers on Mitlenatch is quite impressive. Blooming of many species continues as long as sufficient moisture remains. Once the surface moisture is used up these species quickly seed. Other plants like prickly pear cactus, harvest brodiaea and gumweed have different strategies for retaining moisture to aid blooming.

Wildlife

Western terrestrial garter snake – Some of the largest garter snakes in British Columbia reside on Mitlenatch Island. These harmless snakes may grow to more than 90 centimetres (36 inches). They are often dark grey with black markings. Frequently they are encountered along trails and in beach and tidepool areas where they feed on small fish such as sculpins and blennies.

Marine mammals – Mitlenatch is a favoured haulout for harbor seals and Northern and California sea lions. The sea lions are generally present only from late Autumn until about mid May. River otter (not sea otter) are usually resident. Killer whales and harbor porpoise are often sighted off shore.

Marine life – At low tide, the rocky shores of Mitlenatch Island provide the opportunity to view a wide variety of marine life. At least twelve species of starfish have been found here as well as all the animal types from sponges and sea anemones to tunicates and small fish.

The shallow bays and eelgrass beds are rich in their variety of small fish with shiners, pipefish, staghorn, sculpins, sand dabs and greenling being common. Tidepools, like small aquariums, provide excellent viewing for tidepool sculpin, hermit crabs, anemones, crabs, a variety of shrimp, small crustaceans and many other life forms.

At low tide, Mitlenatch Island is a splendid place to view the phenomena of intertidal zonation. At various locations the white band of barnacles, followed by a dark band with mussels, a band of green algae and at the lowest portion of the beach a brown band of seaweed are easily seen.

Seabirds

Seabird colonies are very sensitive to disturbance. **Visitors must stay on designated trails and pets are not permitted.** When approaching the "Observation Blind" **keep your party together and move slowly.** This will reduce the birds' anxiety and allow you to observe their behaviour and 'family life' more easily. Remain quiet while behind the blind.

Pelagic cormorant nest on steep cliffs in loose colonies. Nests are constructed of seaweed and grass, cemented together with guano. *Eggs:* 4 to 6 (light blueish white in colour). *Food:* small fish.

Note: Nesting cormorants are very easily disturbed and when frightened desert their nests exposing eggs and/or young to crow and gull predation. Nesting cormorants are best viewed quietly, from the water, from a very slow moving boat.

Pigeon guillemot nest in rock crevices, under large boulders and driftwood. Nests are lined with a few chips of rock, shell or wood. *Eggs:* 2 (very pale grey with small dark blotches). *Food:* small fish, especially sculpins, blennies and shiners.

Glaucous-winged gull 3,000 pairs of glaucous-winged gulls choose to nest on Mitlenatch Island. This large pink-legged gull with grey wing tips is the common seaful of Georgia Strait. Adults start arriving in April to take up a breeding territory which will be held against all comers until early August when their young depart. Eggs begin to appear about late May with the first young hatching in late June. The incubation period, from the time the last egg is laid, is 27 days.

Almost as soon as the young hatch they can move around. Instinctively they peck at the red spot on their parent's bill to induce feeding. Adults will then regurgitate food as a warm partly digested meal. Everything from fish to garbage may be on the menu. For the patient observer, this ritual can be watched from the gull blind.

By the end of August most young gulls have left the island. Banding studies indicate these grey-brown juveniles will winter within 100 kilometres (60 miles) of Mitlenatch.

Northwestern crow is one of the more conspicuous birds on Mitlenatch. Their bulky platform nests, placed in thickets, small trees and sometimes on the ground, hold 3 to 4, bluish green, brown mottled eggs. *Food:* anything available (crabs, clams, berries, seabird eggs, carrion, regurgitated food from gulls). By the way, "Did you protect your lunch?"

For More Information

BC Parks

<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks>



Ministry of Water, Land
and Air Protection



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Mitlenatch Island

PROVINCIAL PARK



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elcome to Mitlenatch Island.

This provincial nature park, comprising 36 hectares of land and 119 hectares of water, is the largest seabird colony in the Strait of Georgia.

In 1959 the province of British Columbia purchased Mitlenatch from the Manson family estate and in 1961 it was designated as a provincial nature park. The park boundary extends 300 metres (1000 feet) out from the shore. All sedentary marine life, including abalones, scallops, and sea cucumbers are fully protected within this zone. Collecting is not permitted at Mitlenatch Island, except for intertidal shellfish as specified in Department of Fisheries regulations.

Mitlenatch is an Indian word with a number of meanings. In Coast Salish it has been translated to mean "calm waters all around." Perhaps the most descriptive meaning comes from the Sliammon language where "metl" meant calm and "nach" meant posterior. Calm (waters) behind is an apt description of the island during stormy weather. To the Kwagiulth people "mah-kwee-lay-lah" meant "it looks close, but seems to move away as you approach it."

Vancouver Island