



## **Thank you for your interest in the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program.**

This document is designed to answer common questions and help you decide if the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program is right for you. If, after reading the information, you would like to participate, please see the last section on how to register and be assigned a route. The annual survey season begins in early spring (March/April) and, ideally, we need everyone registered by early February as materials are distributed the last week of the month. We can accommodate late registrations but please register as soon as you are certain that you want to participate.

**Survey Summary:** In general, volunteers monitor marshes close to home and can survey amphibians, birds or both depending on their skill and time availability. The materials we provide instruct people on route establishment and survey techniques. Novices can readily learn to identify calling frog and toads from the materials we provide. For bird surveys, we ask that you are able to identify 50 common marsh species prior to attempting the surveys. On average it takes about 10 hours a year to survey. But, during the first season, more time is needed as you learn the techniques and set up the route. Amphibian surveys are conducted after dark and before midnight and bird surveys can be conducted in the early morning or early evening (before dark) depending on the route you choose.

Surveys are conducted annually and are timed to coincide with appropriate climatic conditions. This is particularly true for amphibians as their breeding corresponds more with annual temperature patterns than calendar dates. Whether you survey amphibian or birds a good general rule is the earlier you can survey within the breeding window the better.

For more information visit [www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/glmmp](http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/glmmp) or the slide show at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwDkhSMbfA0KV295dks2WnVSMnE0cDI0OVlzSIVJZw/view?usp=sharing> .

**Purpose:** Wetlands provide habitat critical for sustaining many fish and wildlife species, they store carbon, improve water quality, help stabilize shorelines and absorb excess nutrients. But, Wetlands have been drained, filled, and polluted for decades, resulting in a reduction in population levels of many wetland-dependent species. It is important that we monitor our remaining wetlands to track their health, the health of wetland birds and amphibians, and the general health of the Great Lakes watershed.

**How does the protocol work?** Marsh Monitoring surveys are conducted on MMP survey routes. An MMP survey route consists of as few as 1 or up to as many as 8, semi-circular sample stations, each with a radius of 100-metres (110 yards). Sample stations must face areas of emergent marsh vegetation. Small numbers of trees or

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shrubs can occur within the station but more than half of the area within the semi-circle must be dominated by non-woody, emergent plants such as cattail, bulrush, reed, grasses or sedges. For more information on this see the attached Route Establishment Fact Sheet (attached).

Both the marsh bird and amphibian surveys are conducted facing into the marsh while standing at the centre of the 200-metre (220 yard) diameter semi-circle (station).

Stations are usually accessed along the edge of marshes, on a dike or trail. However, volunteers interested in monitoring a route accessible only by boat or canoe are encouraged to do so. In very large marshes, it may be possible for several different routes to be established by one or more volunteers. In smaller or less accessible marshes, it may be feasible to establish only 1 or 2 stations.

**Amphibian Surveys** use a calling-code procedure where volunteers listen for three minutes at each station and record the level of intensity of each group of frogs or toads (chorus) calling. Surveys are conducted at least three times during the spring and are timed to match the predominant breeding periods for early, mid-season and late season frogs and toads (anurans), these Survey Windows are latitude and temperature dependent, for example, our most southern volunteers usually survey during the first two weeks of April, the first two weeks of May and the first two weeks of June but their first survey window may bump into late March if we are having an early spring.

**Bird Surveys** use a broadcast call that attracts the attention of marsh birds that are not normally recorded using other survey techniques. Surveyors play the broadcast and record all the birds they see and hear within their station during a 15-minute survey.

Habitat descriptions are simple, multiple choice, fill in the blank forms that need to be completed annually for each station. Habitat forms need to be completed in the daylight and can be completed by the surveyor or by their survey partner.

### **What are a survey participant's responsibilities?**

- Register and be assigned a route, confirm your participation annually.
- Choose the type of surveys you would like to conduct (birds, amphibians or both, all volunteers are asked to complete the simple habitat descriptions).
- Learn the protocol and the species id.
- Survey the set route stations following the standard protocol.
- Complete the standard data forms provided.
- Return the data to Birds Canada in a timely fashion.
- Commit to survey for as many years as possible.
- Be available to answer any data related questions (when needed).

### **What is done with the data?**

Once surveys are completed the standardized form are returned to Birds Canada for processing. Processed and quality checked data are then combined with records collected since 1995 to produce long-term population trends and to help assess the

state of Great Lakes basin marshes and the Great Lakes in general. Our public reports and newsletters are available via the website. Birds Canada also produces scientific publications and reports to the International Joint Commission on the Great Lakes.

### **Frequently Asked Questions.**

**Do I choose my route?** Absolutely! Volunteers need to think about what is best for them and their skill sets, if the route is not a good choice for your schedule and abilities you will not enjoy surveying it. Also, keep in mind the travel time to site, long drive times are not only onerous but you may find it difficult to match the weather conditions if your local micro-climate differs from that of the wetland you travel to. This is particularly true at large coastal marshes.

**Where are the routes?** You can see the route activity map at [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1cZVkRiRAIMmZmS8kU\\_PcloN4hkkUTeIV&ll=44.93994237057499%2C-87.29517450000003&z=6](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1cZVkRiRAIMmZmS8kU_PcloN4hkkUTeIV&ll=44.93994237057499%2C-87.29517450000003&z=6) (or type in [tinyurl.com/glmpmap](http://tinyurl.com/glmpmap)). You can click on each marker and learn about a specific route.

Our Marsh Monitoring route assignment priorities are that the wetland: is presently not monitored (these are identified as available); has an already established route; and is close to home (or work, or cottage). Volunteers should also consider their personal skills (can you survey from a canoe), their comfort level (are you Ok in a remote situation, do you like to be isolated in the dark), their physical ability (how far are you willing/able to hike, do you need a roadside route or one on an easy access boardwalk) and their time availability (do you have time for 2 stations or 6).

**There are no routes available near me!** Then you can establish a new route in any nearby marsh by following the steps explained in the Route Establishment Factsheet (attached) as well as in the program's Getting Started Handbook.

**What is a marsh?** A marsh is a low-lying wetland with vegetation. The water can be still or slowly moving, permanent or temporary. Small numbers of trees or shrubs may occur but commonly the vegetation consists of plants such as cattails, rushes, reeds, grasses or sedges. In open water areas submerged and floating aquatic plants such as lily pads will flourish.

**I live near a swamp can I survey there?** Under its present protocol, the Marsh Monitoring Program only surveys marsh habitat. This means that you cannot survey a true swamp. But, marshes may be misnamed as a swamp plus there are also many large wetland complexes that include both swamps and marsh components. We recommend that you go visit your preferred wetland with the Route Establishment Factsheet in hand and decide if enough marsh exists to place one or more stations. If yes, then a new route can be placed in the wetland.

**Do I have to survey both birds and amphibian?** No, you do not. You can survey birds, or amphibians, or both. We do ask that all volunteers ensure that habitat information is gathered annually for their route.

**I am not sure my bird identification is good enough!** Just dot down all the marsh birds you can i.d. – that will help you decide. Also, try out a couple of bird quiz websites such as [www.birdquiz.net](http://www.birdquiz.net) (intermediate level); <http://www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica> or <https://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/trend/birdquiz.html>. If you perform well, then you probably are at the appropriate skill level. But, if you are still uncertain start with amphibians, practice your bird identification, and join the bird surveys at a later date. If you are confident in your i.d. skills consider trying out <http://www.birdercertification.org> (and let us know how you did).

**Do I receive materials to help me out?** Of course! The Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program will send you a participant's kit for your first survey season. The package will include the three required handbooks (Getting Started, Amphibian Surveys, Bird Surveys), a training CD, a broadcast Cd, and a full complement of data forms. During future survey years, you will receive a participant update package that includes factsheets, a letter, and new data forms. Most participants receive their materials in late February, early March but, if you register late you will receive them a week or so later.

**The Volunteer Portal:** There is a secure online website at [www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/mmp](http://www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/mmp) where you can create a login and access electronic copies of all materials including MP3 files. But, register for the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program (see link below) prior to signing up for the online resources as they are for participants only.

There is no substitution for the three handbooks which all participants need to read but, to assist you with your learning, you can review Introduction to the Marsh Monitoring Program Slide show at <https://docs.google.com/open?id=0BwDkhSMbfA0KV295dks2WnVSMnE0cDI0OVzSIVJZw>. Plus videos of our "new volunteer" webinars available on the Birds Canada YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/user/BirdStudiesCanada>).

**What about onsite training?** Onsite training is very uncommon. From the beginning the Great Lakes Marsh Monitoring Program was designed in such a way so that volunteers can survey without being trained by a program staff member. The three protocols are great and the training CD is terrific for teach amphibian id, amphibian survey technique and refreshing marsh bird id skills. But, we know that the first survey season is difficult and people have a lot of questions. In some areas we have regional coordinators in several areas (Ohio, Essex/Windsor, Muskokas, Niagara Region, Grand River, Oshawa, Algoma/North Channel) that can help you with issues plus you can contact the Volunteer Manager, Kathy Jones, at any time. In 2018 we conducted two webinars – one for new bird surveyors and one for new amphibian surveyors both of which are available on the Birds Canada YouTube channel.

**What do I need to do to prepare to survey?** The biggest mistake volunteers make is not to read both the Getting Started Handbook and their Survey techniques handbooks (amphibians and/or birds) prior to surveying. **Take the time to review the handbook examples as well** – they will really help you understand how to complete the paperwork. In addition, make sure you review the training CD which includes

information on species identification as well as survey tips plus walk your route in advance of your survey night.

**What equipment is needed?** All bird surveyors will need to provide their own broadcast unit but in many situations, this just means getting a powerful amplified speaker (has its own batteries) that can attach to a personal device. We recently discovered that Portable (PA) speaking amplifiers are great. They cost slightly more but make up for it by having great rechargeable batteries and preventing the need to expose your expensive personal items to the elements. Our personal experience suggest that the PA speakers are fairly robust, taking considerable abuse including being dropped into the water.

**Other equipment needs** include pencil or pen, clipboard, insect repellent, flashlights, cell phone, compass or GPS/smart phone and binoculars. Most importantly of all find a friend to survey with you. Marshes are very isolated and having a survey partner is the safe way to enjoy them.

**Transportation and Accessibility:** Likely you will need your own vehicle as it is rare to find marshes in areas with public transportation. Because of the nature of marshes most routes require hiking along trails or dykes, on rare occasion we have accessible routes with well-built trails, boardwalks or on the edges of highway. Check out the map or contact Kathy if you need a more accessible route and you are not sure where to look.

**How do I register to participate?** Visit the **route map** <https://tinyurl.com/glmmppmap> to review available routes. Then **request a route** at <https://tinyurl.com/needanMMProute>. Completing the request a route form will ensure you are registered as a potential participant and that you are formally in the queue for route assignment. **Note this is a double-opt in process**, we request an email confirmation to ensure we protect your privacy and anti-spam rights.

If/when you confirm your participation in the MMP you will be added to our system as a registered volunteer and will receive the Birds Canada News email (unless you are already a Birds Canada member/volunteer). The Birds Canada News email arrives in your inbox out once a month and I highly recommend you take the time to enjoy it. But, if you find it does not interest you, you can readily unsubscribe via the link at the bottom of the news email.

I hope you will join our team and I look forward to hearing from you.

**Kathy Jones, M.Sc.F.**

Volunteer Manager

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