

# Buffalo Pound

## Provincial Park

### Nicolle Flats Marsh Boardwalk

#### Please Remember

- Do not pick flowers and plants, or damage trees.
- Respect the wildlife by not feeding or harassing them.
- Help to keep the park clean – pick up litter and recycle where possible.
- Keep pets under control. Pets must be leashed.
- Take only pictures. Leave only footprints.

Emergency Information		
RCMP	Moose Jaw	911
Ambulance	Moose Jaw	911
Hospital	Moose Jaw Union	(306) 694-0200
Fire Watch		1-800-667-9660
Park Emergency		1-800-667-1788

After you have made contact with emergency services, please notify the park office to advise them of the situation.

Park Information	
Inquiry Centre	(306) 953-3751
Within Canada	1-800-205-7070
Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	
Turn-In-Poachers	1-800-667-7561
Email:	BuffaloPound@serm.gov.sk.ca
Website:	www.saskparks.net



Visa, Mastercard and debit cards accepted.

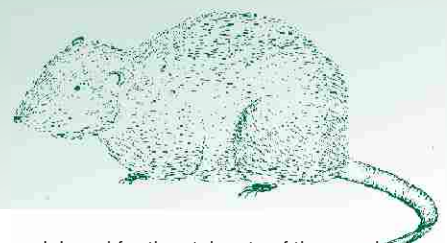




SASKATCHEWAN  
**PARKS**

# Welcome to Nicolle Flats

It takes just a few minutes to walk the marsh boardwalk, but this short route takes you into the heart of a remarkable landscape. The marsh is a magnet for wildlife, and if you take your time, you are sure to see or hear many of the residents.



#### At the Marsh's Edge

The **shy sora** rail likes to stay under cover at the marsh's edge, where it maneuvers with ease through very dense vegetation. You may not see one, but you are almost sure to hear it. Listen for its plaintive call – a musical descending “whinny”.

The **yellow-headed blackbird** has a personality as bold as its colors. Even though they arrive later than the red-wings, yellow-headed blackbirds take over red-wing territory, pushing the former occupants out to the far edge of the marsh. If you get too close to their nests, the yellow-heads will scold you soundly.

The **American bittern** is the ultimate camouflage artist. To conceal itself, the bittern stands in tall grasses, points its head and bill straight up, and sways back and forth in time to the windblown grasses.

Listen for its deep, hollow call resonating across the marsh in the evening. To some, it sounds like a stake being driven into the ground.

The **western plains garter snake** is easily recognized by a bright orange stripe down its back. It patrols the wet edge of the marsh for frogs, salamanders, insects and small fish. It will also raid the nests of red-winged blackbirds to feed on eggs and young.

The **muskrat** is a true marsh specialist. It is an excellent swimmer and diver, and can stay underwater for up to 15 minutes when relatively inactive. A flap of skin that closes behind its front teeth allows it to feed underwater on the stems and roots of cattails, rushes and pondweeds.

In winter, the muskrat builds cattail ‘push-ups’ over holes in the ice. It uses these mini-lodges to rest and feed between underwater dives for aquatic plants.

#### Old Plants - New Technologies

Marsh wildlife depend on aquatic plants for food and shelter. People too, have utilized these plants for centuries.

Native people used the strong hollow stems of **phragmites** to make pipestems and arrowshafts. **Arrowhead** and **cattail** roots were roasted and eaten with meat, while cattail ‘down’ was used to cover wounds and to pad cradle boards.

Today we continue to find ingenious new uses for ancient plants. Duckweed, a favorite of dabbling ducks, gives off methane when it decomposes and may in the future be used as a ‘biofuel’.

More immediate use is envisioned for the stalwarts of the marsh – **cattail** and **bulrush**. It seems these two have an insatiable appetite for raw sewage! Their roots secrete an antibiotic which attacks fecal bacteria, while their roots can absorb many toxic chemicals without damaging the plants. Thus, these plants, available in any prairie pothole, may have considerable economic value as natural water purifiers.

#### More than Mallards

No doubt when most of us think ‘duck’ we think ‘mallard’, but mallards are only one of many species found at this marsh. Over 40 species of waterbirds have been seen at Nicolle flats, each one finding its own niche in the marsh world.

The **pintail** has the widest range of any North American duck. Like the mallard, it is a ‘dabbler’ or surface feeding duck. Dabblers are chiefly vegetarians, bobbing for duckweed, arrowhead and pondweed. They will also eat invertebrates such as insects, snails and freshwater shrimp. The fact that mosquito larva are one of the pintails favorite meals should add to people’s enjoyment of pintails.

The **canvasback** is a ‘diving duck’, which might be seen diving underwater to feed on the roots of sago pondweed, one of its favorite foods. It also eats invertebrates and small fish.

The feet of the canvasback are placed far back on its body for power in diving, a feature that makes it awkward on land and during its long running take off. However, once airborne the canvasback is a very powerful flier and can reach speeds of 100 kilometres per hour.

The **shoveler** is easily recognized by its oversized bill, which is specially designed for straining floating microscopic plants and animals known as plankton. Thus, it has been called the ‘whale of the duck world’, since some whales also strain plankton (if on a slightly larger scale!). As plankton feeders, shovelers can thrive in open waters, far from the vegetated edge of the marsh.

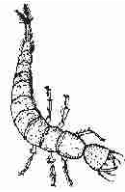
The **coot** is not a duck at all but a member of the rail family. When swimming it pumps its head back and forth with each stroke. It can dive well, but also feeds on the water’s surface. Like diving ducks, coots skitter across the water before take off. Listen for the constant babble of their ‘churking’ calls.

**Grebes** are 'tailless' waterbirds with slender bills and lobed rather than webbed feet. They are excellent divers and have the ability to lower themselves in the water like submarines. They feed on aquatic insects and small fish.

Both horned and eared grebes build floating nests of decaying plants, usually sheltered from wind and waves by surrounding plants. Heat given off by the decaying nest material helps to warm and humidify the eggs. Look for young grebes riding on their parents' backs as they swim along.

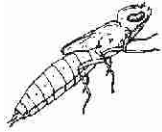
**Underwater World**

The marsh is as alive underwater as it is above. From the edge of the boardwalk, look down into the water for a glimpse of some of these 'underworld' inhabitants . . .



The strange looking '**water tiger**' earns its name from its ferocious hunting methods. This predator attacks other aquatic insects by grasping them with sharp pincers and sucking out their body fluids. The water tiger is actually the larva of the predaceous diving beetle which feeds on aquatic insects and is in turn eaten by diving ducks.

The **dragonfly nymph** is also carnivorous and catches its prey by thrusting out its movable lower jaw. In this fashion, it can devour prey as large as a minnow.



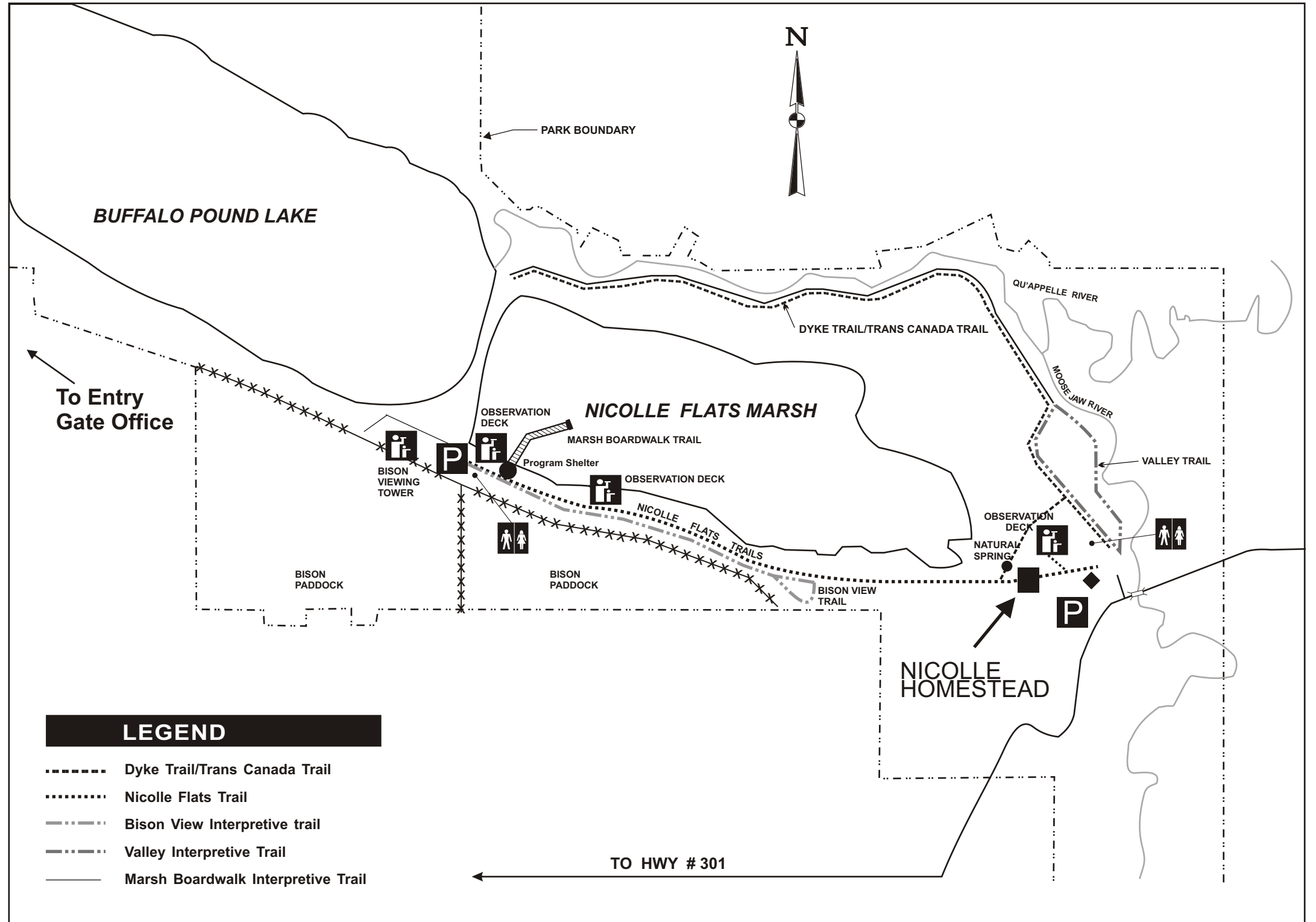
When the adult is ready to emerge, the nymph climbs up a cattail or bulrush stalk. In early summer, look amongst the cattails for discarded nymph skeletons and for dragonflies drying their new wings in the sun.



The **water boatman** has developed ingenious adaptations to underwater life. It uses long oarlike legs to propel itself through the water, and much like a scuba diver, it carries its own oxygen supply. Periodically it rises to the surface, captures an air bubble under its shell, and dives to the bottom to feed on algae and decaying debris.

At first glance this insect looks like a piece of discarded plant material, but what you are seeing is the 'mobile home' of the **caddisfly larva**. It collects sand and bits of leaves, twigs and shell, which are cemented together with its own saliva to build a hiding place from which to feed.

The caddisfly larva 'grazes' along the marsh bottom feeding on decaying plants and animals, recycling this organic material back into the marsh food chain.



**LEGEND**

- Dyke Trail/Trans Canada Trail
- ..... Nicolle Flats Trail
- . . . . . Bison View Interpretive trail
- Valley Interpretive Trail
- Marsh Boardwalk Interpretive Trail