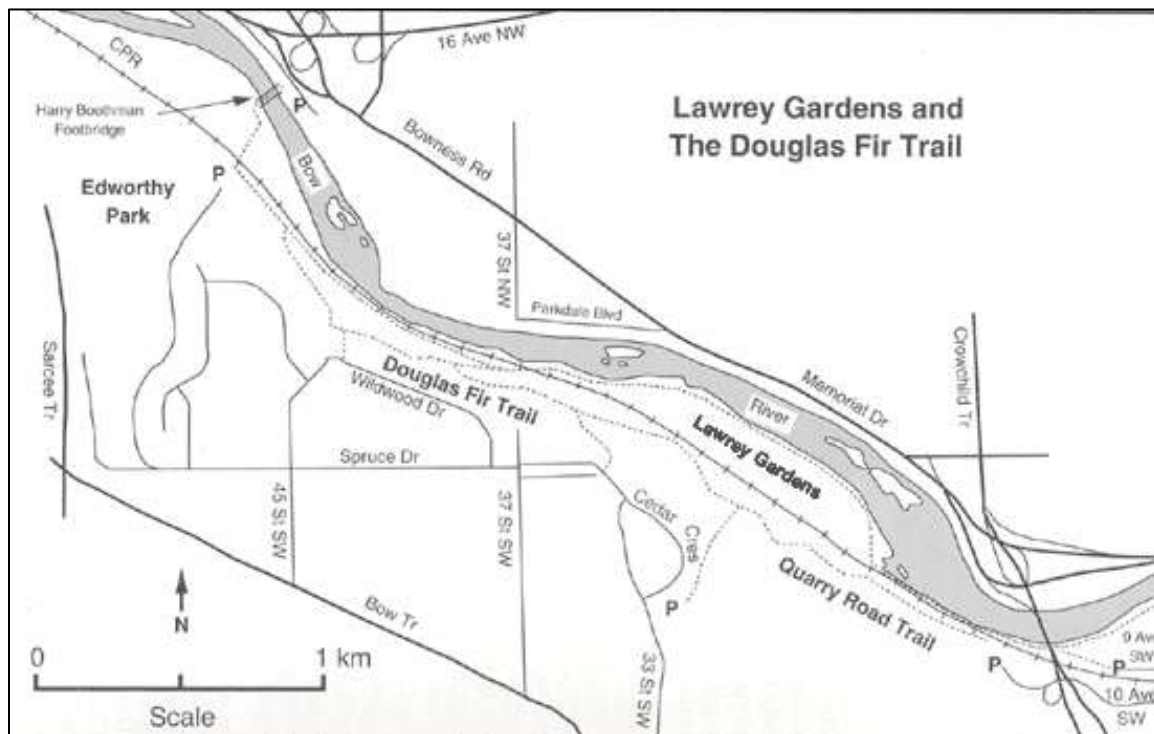**Lawrey Gardens Natural Area and The Douglas Fir Trail**
*by Ross Dickson and Massey Jones and City of Calgary – revised Sep/2012*

The mountain-like vegetation of the Douglas Fir Trail and riparian woodland of Lawrey Gardens at the eastern end of Edworthy Park help to concentrate a locally unique mixture of bird species. Stretching along the south side of the Bow River in northwest Calgary the area contains a steep north-facing escarpment, grasslands, floodplain and ravines just minutes from downtown.

From the north, the Douglas Fir Trail can be accessed by: parking at the Harry Boothman pedestrian bridge, accessed from the intersection of Bowness Road and Shaganappi Trail. Follow the footpath across the bridge and the railway, and then turn left (east) towards the conifers. Visitors from the southwest can find parking areas by leaving Bow Trail at 45 St. SW and turning west at Spruce Drive, which then enters Edworthy Park. For those who wish to visit Lawrey Gardens from the east side, parking is also available at the Pumphouse Theatre, at the west end of 9 Ave. SW. An alternative parking area, closer to Lawrey Gardens, can be reached by following 20 Ave. west, under the Crowchild Trail bridge, to its very end, then turning right along the lane behind the first row of commercial buildings and proceeding slowly, on a rough track that can be muddy, to a parking area on the south side of the railway tracks.



The 1.5 km Douglas Fir Trail is an occasionally steep pathway along the escarpment. The area contains one of the most easterly stands of Douglas

Fir in Alberta; some of the trees are more than 400 years old. To bird this area effectively during migration, find an open area in the forest (especially with a trickle of water) and wait there. **Note**: The Douglas Fir Trail is closed in winter due to hazard caused by frozen seepages.

For those who are short of time or cannot access the Douglas Fir Trail in its entirety, there is an entrance off a small park on Wildwood Drive (close to the "W" of Wildwood on the map above, note the dotted line). You can take Calgary Transit Route #17 to get there, for those who do not drive.

Once on Wildwood, you can then hike for about 5 minutes through a small park into the woodland, coming directly in line with the main Douglas Fir Trail observatory, overlooking the Bow River for a considerable distance. There are benches there to rest. Hikers then have the option of turning right or left, following the Douglas Fir Trail, either to Edworthy Park or into Lawrey Gardens. The alternate is straight down quite a few (steep) stairs to the bicycle pathway next to the Canadian Pacific railway tracks. At or near the area is a railway crossing and a small island nearby (inaccessible on foot), where further birding can be carried out. In fact, taking the above shortcut will cut foot travel on the Douglas Fir Trail by approximately half, when time is of the essence.

The Douglas Fir Trail lookout is at the bottom of the map (see link to Edworthy Park close-up). Observers will find lots of parking on both sides of the Bow River if they visit Edworthy Park first. The bridge shown on the map is a footbridge. Observers can then proceed to the lookout It's a hike not recommended for those not in shape, as there are stairs… stairs... and more stairs to climb to the lookout. They zigzag almost straight up the escarpment! To reach the stairs from Edworthy Park, follow the (paved) bike path for about a thousand yards, more or less. At Edworthy Park, other than the actual tended area, the rest is mostly scrub trees, lots of them.

The Bow River Pathway, a paved trail at the base of the escarpment, provides access to an area of riparian woodland. More used by joggers and cyclists than by birders, Lawrey Gardens has recently gained a reputation as a good alternative to Inglewood Bird Sanctuary for finding migrating passerines in May, August and September.

A small shallow backwater at the eastern end of Lawrey Gardens often has small numbers of ducks and shorebirds. In fall, this stretch of the river is worth checking carefully for a variety of gulls and migrant waterfowl. Sora rails in fact frequent another pond, "South Sora". In and around these ponds you can find Boreal Chorus Frogs, Wood Frogs and two species of garter snakes, Wandering and Red-sided or Common. Along the shoreline, you can walk among large Balsam Poplars and tall shrubs, and listen to the variety of

birds, such as warbles, vireos and catbirds that frequent this environment. Offshore, in the Bow River, there are gravel bars that host huge populations of ducks, Canada Geese and California and Ring-billed Gulls.

The Quarry Road Trail is a dirt pathway that extends along the escarpment south of the railway tracks, from the 10 Ave. parking lot, parallel to Lawrey Gardens, featuring shrubbery and poplars rather than conifers, for most of its 1 km length. It can be very good for vireos, warblers and sparrows during migration.

When in Edworthy Park freight trains are frequent and heavy (110 - 150 cars both ways), so observers should keep quite clear of the tracks. Trains are not allowed to blow the whistle in that area.

## **Some history of the area:**

John Lawrey settled in this area as a neighbour to the Edworthy Family in 1882 and established the successful and well-known market garden. This garden market supplied railway crews and homesteaders with fresh fruit & vegetables and played an important role in the early development of Calgary. John Lawrey died in 1904 at the age of 66 leaving his property to two nephews who farmed the land until World War I.

Edworthy Park was once a part of the Cochrane Ranch and was eventually purchased by Thomas Edworthy in 1883. John Lawrey, and his neighbour Edworthy established a profitable garden market that supplied fresh fruit and vegetables to railway crews and homesteaders. In later years, after discovering sandstone on his property, he operated sandstone quarries for the construction of many buildings in Calgary. The City purchased the land in 1962 for the development of a park.