

Lake Erie Open Water Community

Lake Erie is the most biologically productive of the Great Lakes, in part because it is the warmest and shallowest. Above and beneath the surface of the water there is a complex natural community, from floating plankton to bald eagles. Although this community has partially recovered from the water pollution of past decades, it is under extreme stress from causes ranging from shoreline habitat alteration to the invasion of exotic species, such as the zebra mussel, sea lamprey, and round goby.

Still, the lake teems with life. Shallow, nearshore areas have beds of aquatic plants, such as eel grass, Richardson's pondweed, small-leaved pondweed, and several species of water naiad and Eurasian water milfoil. Mayflies emerge from the bottom sediments in great swarms, joining other aquatic insects and forage fish to provide food for larger fish, including walleye, yellow perch, lake sturgeon, northern pike, and long-nose gar. Countless warblers, ducks, and raptors migrate along the lakeshore every spring and fall. Ring-billed and herring gulls gather in large flocks every winter. Every day there is a new panorama of life to see.

Where to Go

- ☞ Mentor Headlands State Park (Lake County, OH)
- ☞ Presque Isle State Park (Erie County, PA)



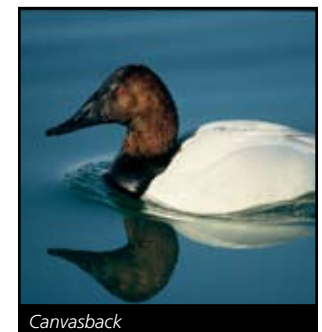
Sanderling



Lake Erie mussels



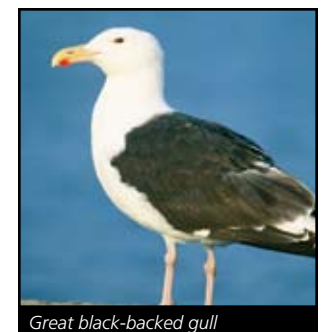
Grass pickerel



Canvasback



Yellow perch



Great black-backed gull



Mayfly



Headlands Beach dunes



Beach pea

Lake Erie at Vermilion (Erie County, OH)