

HASN'T BEEN IDENTIFIED SINCE 1925

Fernald's milk-vetch rediscovered at Barr'd Harbour highlands

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Where do you find a rare plant that hasn't been seen in Newfoundland since 1925?

That was the question posed by a group of researchers who set out to find Fernald's Milk-vetch last week.

The last time this rare member of the pea-family was seen in Newfoundland was over 75 years ago in the highlands around Barr'd Harbour.

Nathalie Djan-Chekar, a botanist with the Newfoundland Inland Fish and Wildlife Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, and a team of researchers decided to go and see if the long lost Newfoundland population of Fernald's Milk-vetch was still there. "We were looking at one big question mark," she says.

Accounts of the plant's discovery in 1925 gave the group only a vague idea of where to look. "We were all scratching our heads and wondering how are we going to find it," Ms. Djan-Chekar said.

The plants grow in calcium-rich soils, so the group based their starting point on what they knew about the area's geology.

Anne Marceau, Nathalie Djan-Chekar, Laurence Lavers, Michael Burzynski, Leah Soper, John Maunder and Dulcie House set out to find the plant. "We were all very excited," says Ms. Djan-Chekar.

The first day the team began the trek to the highlands in search of the Milk-vetch, the rain and fog forced them to come down. The next day the sun was out and they hiked up to a rocky area where they found other plants that grow in similar conditions.

Mr. Maunder had studied the plants in Quebec a week before and was ahead of the rest of the group. "All of a sudden, we heard this hoot," says Ms. Djan-Chekar. Mr. Maunder had found Fernald's Milk-vetch.

The team found several hundred plants growing in the area. "We went as far as we could, but then the area

becomes very treacherous" says Ms. Djan-Chekar.

Ms. Djan-Chekar says she is happy that the New-

foundland population is still there. The plant is considered a threatened variety by The Committee for the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

There are five other known populations of Fernald's Milk-vetch growing in the Blanc-Sablon region of Quebec. All-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles as well as fences and limestone quarries, which are being built in the area, threaten their survival.

Fernald's Milk-vetch blooms throughout July and sometimes into August. Spikes of small flowers that range in colour from purple to white grow from the plant's upper leaves. The plant produces tiny pea pods that are between 0.5 mm to 3 mm long. Its leaves are covered with a soft down.

Ms. Djan-Chekar says the Newfoundland population of Fernald's Milk-vetch is somewhat protected because of its remote location. But she says the plant is still vulnerable because Newfoundland and Quebec are the only areas in the world it can be found.



Fernald's Milk-vetch is a rare member of the pea family that can only be found on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland and the Blanc-Sablon region of Quebec.



The team that hiked to the highlands near Barr'd Harbour and found Fernald's Milk-vetch included (l-r) — Anne Marceau, Nathalie Djan-Chekar, Laurence Lavers, Michael Burzynski, Leah Soper and Dulcie House.