

Limestone Barrens gaining in popularity

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PORT AU CHOIX – There's growing interest in the colourful flora of the Limestone Barrens.

Members of the Orchid Society of the Royal Botanical Gardens of Hamilton, Ontario, recently spent time looking at orchids on the Limestone Barrens at Port au Choix National Historic Site.

Shirley Alyward, Limestone Barrens interpreter for the Port au Choix National Historic Site of Canada, said the group was travelling the island from St. John's to the Northern Peninsula.

"They were looking specif-

ically for orchids, that was their main interest," she said. "They had all kinds of praise for every place that they visited, especially here at Port au Choix."

She said members of the group were amazed with the presence of such beautiful plants because at first glance, the area looks barren.

"It was lovely walking across these barrens and seeing all these plants where you would have thought there wasn't anything growing," said group member Margaret Kendall.

The site at Port au Choix has 47 rare plant species along with many other species within the eight square km of the

national historic site.

"We saw nine species of orchids this morning, including the rare Newfoundland orchid," said tour leader John Maunder. "And the pale coral-root orchids are in perfect bloom, just beautiful for photographs."

Ms. Alyward, who said one of her duties is to take people on guided tours across the Limestone Barrens to look at the wild flowers and geology, said the number of visitors coming to the site this year is consistent with previous years.

"And it's not just visitors from away, it's locals as well," she said. "We try to get the local people to come in and gain a better understanding, awareness and appreciation for the Limestone Barrens in their own backyard."

Millie Spence, who has been site supervisor at Port au Choix for the last nine years, said interest is growing every year.

"There seems to be more people with more questions and interest in taking the tour," said Ms. Spence. "We work very hard here to protect the Limestone Barrens habitat and that's why we have such an interest in the public coming to see our site. The interest is growing as people become more knowledgeable about what we have here."

Ms. Spence said in the last five years they have become