

Beauty on the barrens

Nature has scattered with generous hand beautiful, dwarf-size plants over the Limestone Barrens of the Great Northern Peninsula.

From early spring to late summer, showy mounds of arctic-alpine plants appear in vibrant, jewel-like colours on the barrens.

In the past, these ground-hugging plants, most of which grow from one cm to 15 cm in height, have been overlooked by many a local and visitor alike.

Although Merritt Lyndon Fernald, a botanist at Harvard University, drew attention to the rare plants of the barrens in the early 1900s, it wasn't until the late 1990s that awareness of these special plants and their habitat was raised locally.

Today most residents of the peninsula are aware that they have a paradise of natural beauty growing in their backyards and many take great patriotic pride in their native plant species.

The area extending from Port au Choix National Historic Site to Burnt Cape Ecological Reserve is a 'hotspot of plant diversity' on the Island.

Out of the 298 species of plants considered rare on the Island of Newfoundland, 104 occur in this eco-region and 22 of these species are only found here. Three of these plants, Long's braya, Fernald's braya and the Barrens willow, which are listed as 'species at risk', are found nowhere else in the world!



Red-tipped lousewort



Purple saxifrage



Lapland rosebay



Barrens willow

These barrens are very high in calcium. Many of the plants growing here are calcium specialists. This allows the plants to thrive on the limestone barrens where other plants cannot.

In recent years scientists have identified the limestone barrens habitat of the Great Northern Peninsula as a 'rare and fragile ecosystem'.

Local residents, students, naturalists, and scientists are working together to conserve the natural heritage of the limestone barrens habitat. Their goal is to ensure that these beautiful plants and their habitat remain for future generations.

For more information, log onto to www.limestonebarrens.ca



Above, Alpine bistort; at right, Bird's-eye primrose.



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