

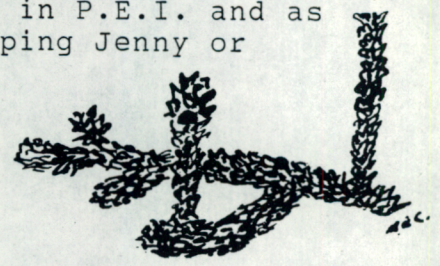
What do they eat?

BY BRUCE MacLAREN

The Ruffed Grouse, known to many as native partridge, is not only handsome, but is also an excellent game bird. I've known and loved these birds for something like seventy years. During that time one would think I'd know all about their eating habits and also their diet. Not so. Just this fall, 1987, I learned about two items of their diet that I had not known before.

It came about this way. Our grandson Ron MacLaren, who lives in Santa Maria, California, was with us for the second week in October. He is an inveterate hunter and, on his first trip after grouse, got his limit of three. As all good hunters should, he examined the contents of the birds' crops very carefully to discover what they had been eating. Just about everything was easily explained - grass shoots and clover leaves, buds of trees and shrubs, Rowan berries, grain from harvested fields, etc. One item puzzled us and neither he nor I could name it. It's a bit difficult to describe but it was something like this: one half to three quarters of an inch long, a bit less than a quarter of an inch wide, a bit off-white in colour and quite short grained with no sign of seeds. On his next trip out Ron brought back a sprig of club-moss with the fruiting body intact. There was no doubt at all that this was what we found in the grouse's crop. This particular club-moss was Lycopodium inundatum, bog club-moss. On his next trip Ron brought back a sprig of ground pine, Lycopodium obscurum, with the top two thirds of the fruiting bodies nipped off, doubtless by a grouse. We have several species of club-moss in P.E.I. and as a youngster I was more inclined to call them Creeping Jenny or Foxtail!

On one of his trips, Ron brought a complete plant of False Lily-of-the-Valley (Maianthemum canadense). The fruit is a small, attractive red berry. It looked as though grouse might approve of it and sure enough, when he opened the crop of the bird he had brought, at least two thirds of the contents were these small red berries.



Lycopodium inundatum

Points of view

It always fascinates me how totally different we can portray the same subject, depending on point of view. Over the last few years, cormorants have received a lot of bad press on P.E.I. Terms such as stinky, ugly, and worse were used to describe them. And yet, as this ad from the New Yorker magazine shows, not everyone has that opinion. The Cormorant Beach Club, in the St. Croix U.S. Virgin Islands uses the bird's name and silhouette to attract tourists. Perhaps it would be worth trying on this Island.



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