

# PEI's floral emblem

BY BRUCE MacLAREN

The Pink Lady's Slipper is one of about twenty two wild orchids known in the province. There is so much that could be written about this lovely plant that it is difficult to find a beginning. Perhaps a good start would be to explain how the Pink Lady's Slipper (Cypripedium acaule) came to be the floral emblem of our province.

In 1947 a floral emblem act was passed by the legislature naming the Showy Lady's Slipper (Cypripedium reginae) as the floral emblem. A few years later not enough of this species could be found in the province to make a display for the Fathers of Confederation building in Charlottetown! In 1965 an amendment to the act named the Pink Lady's Slipper as the floral emblem of the province.

Over a wide range of territory in the northern half of North America the Pink Lady's Slipper is found and is known by a multitude of names. It is difficult to understand how some of these originated. For example: Noah's Ark, hare's lip, old goose and camel's foot. In Quebec the flower is called sabot de la Vierge, shoe of the Virgin.

The bloom of the Pink Lady's Slipper is difficult to describe and I shall not attempt to do so. The really important part of the bloom is the third petal, a pouch (choe) formed by the inflated lip, covered with soft pubescence. The color may vary from white to nearly crimson. The pouch is split down the middle with the lips tightly pressed together, folded inwards with the inner surface covered with long, stiff, white hairs.

Fertilization of the bloom is a very intricate process and is accomplished with the help of quite small insects. The inside floor of the pouch is lined downy hairs that produce a sweet nectar to attract insects. The small insects force a passage through the lower part of the bloom, load up with nectar, and then find they can't get out the way they came in. Looking for a way to escape they see light at the base of the bloom. In their progress towards this exit they must pollinate the flower in which they were trapped and, moving on to the next flower, bring pollen from the first one entered. This is an over-simplification of the pollinating process but does describe it roughly. Maybe some readers have noticed that most Lady's Slippers do not produce seed capsules. Nobody fully understands why but perhaps the best opinion is a shortage of insects of the right kind.

I believe that today we have many more Pink Lady's Slippers than we had fifty years ago. Why do I believe this? Let me tell you of the first Lady's Slipper I ever saw. My oldest brother, a veteran of World War I, was a bit at loose ends for a time after he came home. All of us were brought up to love nature and my brother was probably the best naturalist of all of us. One day he came home greatly excited because he had found a Lady's Slipper. Naturally he did not pick it, but took us all to see the plant, which was growing in moist soil near a stream that originated a short distance away. There was no way that Lady's Slipper could have escaped our notice previously because all our lives, any spare time was spent in the fields and woods. Today, within a radius of one kilometer, there are not dozens but hundreds of Pink Lady's Slippers. In addition the Lady's Slipper was always a favourite of mine and I could not begin to number all of the

