

A NATURALIST'S PARADISE

by Bruce MacLaren, Charlottetown

Those who know me well know that, among my many hobbies, trout fishing and wild flowers are high on the list. For many years trout fishing was in first place, and maybe it still is. However in recent years wild flowers and wild life in general are a close second. For many years now, every time I think of going fishing, Indian Bridge comes to mind, and that's usually where I end up. There are trout there, and good trout; but there is also an abundance of wild flowers, birds and, to a lesser extent, animals. It will be far from complete and sometimes out of sequence, but I should like to share a season with you in an area I think of as a naturalist's paradise.

Indian Bridge is across the Morell River on a dirt road linking Morell Rear with Bangor. Some years it is not possible to get there by car till late April or early May. On the first trip, if the snow is gone and you know where to look, there will be Mayflowers and Teaberries. If you approach the bridge from the Morell Rear side, you may be surprised to see, at the right hand corner of the bridge, something that looks for all the world like Dandelions. It's much too early for them, so look more closely and you'll see there are no leaves, and the flower stems are scaly instead of smooth like those of the Dandelion. This plant is called Coltsfoot and is found in few places in the province.

Early in May, in one particular spot, there's almost sure to be Early Coral Root, not a rare plant but not too common either. Later on, below the bridge you may find Spotted Coral Root, but it's less reliable than the early one. Towards the end of May, if you're lucky, you'll find a fragile looking plant with pink blossoms. It is Spring Beauty and Indian Bridge is one of two places in the province where it has been reported. Oddly enough, it is of the same family as Purslane, an annoying garden weed.

If you have gone upstream, as you should, you'll find a fairly long stretch of rather slow moving water with several deep pools. As you leave one of these, without a trout, you may hear a tremendous splash behind you. For a moment you think that a monster trout has escaped you. Soon though, you'll realize that a beaver was either playing a trick on you or warning his friends that a stranger is in the neighbourhood. Perhaps, further downstream, you may notice a small bundle of weeds, grass, or both, that seems to be defying the laws of motion because it's moving upstream, usually at an angle. Watch for a while and you'll find it's a muskrat moving material for his house. Incidentally, if you like 'fiddleheads' there are two or three good places to gather them.

June is the month when the wild flowers come into their own. It's a bit hard to keep them in order of appearance but here are a few that you're almost sure to find. Nodding Trillium: why this plant insists on keeping its rather attractive bloom out of sight is hard to imagine, but no doubt there's some good reason. Painted Trillium appears soon after. Please don't pick a bouquet. This lovely flower is becoming all too scarce and it's useless as a cut flower anyway. Yellow Clintonia will soon be along with its three

