

Enjoying Mill River - Naturally

by Cindy Crane

Located just off of Route 2 on Route 136 near O'Leary Corner is Mill River Provincial Park. Situated along the rolling banks of scenic Mill River, from which it gets its name, it offers something for every nature lover.

The best way to enjoy Mill River is by canoe, especially during the early morning or evening hours. Canoe rentals may be made at the Marina which is located in the day use area of the park near Rodd's Mill River Resort. The river is tidal and has a large variety of marina life including seaweeds, clams, mussels, a variety of fish including trout and salmon and mammals including mink, muskrat, and the occasional seal. Bird life is spectacular and on any given outing one may see osprey, blue heron, kingfisher, terns, gulls, sandpipers, teal and black duck. It is not at all uncommon during evening paddles to observe blue heron roosting in trees along the river. Osprey nests can also be seen in several locations along the river.

Proceeding upstream from the river the canoeist can enter one of the fresh water streams which empty into Mill River. Here one has the opportunity to observe birds and wildlife up close. If you proceed carefully it is possible to get within several canoe lengths of a fishing blue heron. Kingfishers and terns are plentiful here feeding on the thousands of minnow fish darting in the water. Sandpipers accompany you running along the bank beside the canoe or skimming gracefully along the water's edge. Mink and muskrat can be glimpsed along the bank if one is very observant.

Canoeing is not for everyone of course and those who do not wish to explore the river by canoe may also enjoy it in other ways. The dock at the marina is an excellent spot for bird watching. During early morning or evening blue heron, kingfishers and terns can be seen diving for fish. The hilly area above the marina is an excellent spot for observing osprey and gulls as they soar in the thermals above the river. With binoculars osprey can be seen hovering and diving for fish.

A different variety of wildlife can be found in the meadows and woodlots surrounding the river. An old hay field undergoing natural forest re-growth sports a variety of fragrant wildflowers and berries. Many different types of birds are found here including crows, jays, titmice, robins, warblers, bobolinks and sparrows. Mice and voles are found in the undergrowth and the whole area is alive with grasshoppers, moths and butterflies. An old homestead site is bordered by wild crabapple trees. A swampy area becomes a fern forest with ostrich ferns reaching 5 - 6 feet in height.

The trees in the park range from pure white spruce stands near the marina to hardwood stands of maples, birch and beech. In the spring and early summer the forest floor is covered with Lady Slipper, bluebead lily, trillium, lily-of-the-valley and others.

Whether you visit Mill River Provincial Park for a day or several days there is something for every nature lover. Interpretive programs are offered in the park during July and August. The marina has a number of displays and an informed program staff is available to answer any questions.