

The Reddest Flower

The reddest flower in the world used to grow right here in Ontario with some abundance in natural wetlands. To come upon a mass of *Lobelia Cardinalis* at the edges of a marsh with its roots in an inch or two of water and often with an understory of Ladies' Trusses Orchids is a sight that cannot be forgotten. Sand Bay up near Dillon Ontario still hosts these species with the cyclical low water levels of Georgian Bay.

If you have not seen a pitcher plant in bloom, do so before you die, it has a stunning flower. There are still a few places where its habitat has not been destroyed. At the same time look around for the sky blue flower of our native orchid *reginae*. The H.N. Crossley Nature Reserve off Burgess road down past Rosseau has one of these incredible protected habitats. Highway 518 east of Sprucedale passes through another.

To walk through a cedar bog on a hot summer's day, each of your steps slightly sinking into the thick carpet of iridescent emerald green sphagnum moss still clinging to and saturated with the spring's snow melt, the air 10 degrees cooler than the surrounding forest. The flowing springs that erupt from the lowest spots of the bog serving the purest of cool clear water, for sphagnum purifies water better than any other plant or process.

To snowshoe through the same cedar bog in the winter, the essential seasonal home to the snowshoe hare without which, it will cease to exist in abundance. These cedar bogs were also once the winter home to the ruffed grouse, white tail deer and a host of winter resident birds.

The same cedar bog that slowly released the spring's snowmelt into a clear flowing stream that never went dry even in the hottest years.

That same stream that I fished as a kid was home to a beautiful fish, Ontario's own Aurora brook trout and the black nosed dace.

The tag alder and willow bogs that were the summer home to the snowshoe hare and the nesting habitat of numerous birds like the stunning American Red Start and numerous warblers. To hunt those same willows and alder bogs for woodcock and snipe in the fall, there soils moist enough to host the abundant worm population they needed to survive.

The moist lowland ash forests that were home to the wood frog.

The lowland meadow of wild iris, buttercup and Grass Pink orchids. Swallows sweeping back and forth feeding on flying insects while leopard frogs leap out of harms way from herons, coons, mink, and otter.

To paddle a lake with a shoreline of mature white birch fronting a backdrop of pine, hemlock, and cedar. The catkins of the birch an essential winter food to the Ruffed Grouse.

We lost all of the above and much, much more because we did not mangle our natural resources in a responsible way. Our apathetic and complacent attitude. Our blatant ignorance as to the balance and interaction of species.

Our horrid ignorance of water and what keeps it clean and prosperous to all species.

If you really understood what has been lost you would weep openly. Why did we allow the decimation of so many species and unique habitats for the exaltation of a huge rat? Even dumber making it our national emblem with so many other worthy species to choose from. We lost so much by letting the beaver get completely out of control. Our childish attitude of how cute and industrious they are while slaughtering the wolves because too many adults still believe "Little Red Riding Hood" is a real story. More people in North America are killed in one-day texting (16) than by wolves in our history, only two in the whole history of North America.

When I see articles aggrandizing the greatness of beavers I understand these people have spent no amount of time in our wilds, nor do they have any understanding of what these rats have destroyed. For after they have destroyed the habitat of other flora and fauna, they will pollute to the point of their own demise. Leaving in their wake the soils soured, the biodiversity gone and the waters that supply your wells, rivers and lakes waters polluted with methanol, formaldehyde, mercury and huge levels of total organic carbon killing everything downstream in its wake. The methane escaping at night from these rat made swamps killing all the birds roosting.

Beavers were never abundant here before we cut down the mature pine forest. There was nothing in the understory of the old growth canopy for them to eat. It was the massive regeneration of hardwoods after the pines were logged, that gave them their

abundance of food, the same reason why we have the White Tailed Deer.

Eventually as happened in 1946 when their populations last peaked, a disease like Tularemia (rabbit fever) will wipe them out, and, maybe after many, many decades the exotic beauty that was lost will be naturally restored. Will our great, great grandchildren manage things any better?

The small percentage of these unique habitats that are left, are still vulnerable and unprotected because every level of government in our country belongs to the Church of the Holy Beaver and believe these rats are ordained of God. Just like the people of India who worship the common rat, feeding, protecting, and building temples to them. If you want to build a home or cottage near a wetland, the same governments that will stop you, will allow the beaver to destroy it. Whereas your township may dictate what trees you can trim or fell, beavers are exempt from these same bylaws.

I see people talking about the loss of biodiversity while totally ignoring the decimation of species this giant rat has caused. Picture if you will your town flooded 4 feet deep with stagnant polluted water. It would certainly change who and what could live there.

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