

When do salmon jump?

by Bob Belliveau-Ferrin Lemieux

Have you been to the Nepisiquit in September or October?

I spend most of my time exploring New Brunswick's back roads, off-roads and hideaways in search of unique locations, unusual situations and a good story.

Green-eyed observers believe that I have far too much time on my hands as a nature loving junkie and photo-journalist. I agree.

My lifestyle is gratifying and fulfilling. I get to drive my RV with my four wheel truck in tow to most of North America's most scenic locations. When permitted, I park on million dollar real estate for free, with breathtaking views and magnificent sounds. My traveling partner, Jack (my two year old Chihuahua), and I hang out and explore our new digs until we run out of film or locals who regale us with anecdotes that keep us amused.

Whether Jack and I are hunting for a good picture, enjoying the company of commercial fishermen or creating an impressive image of a rare bird, we enjoy the best of all worlds.

However, as I have become more tranquil and sage, I've found society spending too much attention on the negative and less time on the positive side of nature and the exploration of our enlightening environment. I see the destruction of the habitats, beaches, wetlands and timber stands on a daily basis. It's tragic, sad and infuriating. Complaining and non-focused rhetoric won't change a thing. However, a pro-active, logical and well researched population of caring humans can make a change. My glass is half-full, not half-empty.

I fell in love with the Nepisiquit River late in September and early October as Jack and I roamed her back roads, crawling up and down her banks, listening to the

sounds of nature's symphony. Her magical notes, carried by her gentle breeze, whispered to me, as I absorbed the warm autumn sun on her pebble shore. Captivated by the radiant beauty of her rainbow colored deciduous leaves I was reminded that this was Christmas without the lights.

The colors of fall, the rivers challenging landscape and the peacefulness of her rushing waters provided me with the spiritual completeness that has been enjoyed for centuries by our First Nation brothers and sisters on the Pabineau Falls Reservation.

The Nepisiquit is not only a nature lover's paradise; it is also New Brunswick's premier salmon river.

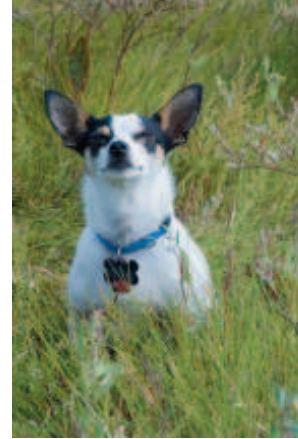
But for the commitment of a few dedicated conservationists, the success story of the Nepisiquit might never have happened.

As far back as history allows, the Nepisiquit was the annual home to a mammoth run of Atlantic salmon and sea trout. In the late 1800's, the river's reputation as "the" Salmon River in eastern Canada far surpassed the fabled Miramichi.

A dark cloud began to form upstream, however, as zinc and nickel mining operations opened for business a century ago. It was simply a matter of time before the river would experience a man-made disaster.

In 1969, heavy acidic residue and waste sulfide were (*accidentally*) dumped into the river creating a toxic cocktail that disseminated the river's juvenile salmon population and created an avoidance reaction from the mature salmon returning to their spawning grounds.

It took five years before the river flushed itself



While Bob labors rigorously in the meadows and marshes, his loyal assistant Jack, sits in the sun and takes time to smell the marsh lavender.



If you have the patience and nothing but time, September and October are great months to watch the salmon jumping at Pabineau Falls on the Nipisquit River, near Bathurst.

her back roads, crawling up and down her banks, listening to the

The Nipisquit Ringlet Butterfly is rare and endangered. It lives only one week a year. It has been with us since the time of the dinosaurs. It is indigenous to three New Brunswick marshes, Beresford (near Bathurst), Bas Caraquet and Bertrand (both in the Acadian Peninsula).

clean and salmon began to return to the river. Their presence, at its mouth in the Bay of Chaleur, was the “call-to-action” for the local angling fraternity.

The Nepisiquit Salmon Association located in Bathurst, New Brunswick is a conservation organization we can be proud of and a model we might consider using if we are willing to make the commitment to preserving our environment and wildlife habitats throughout the Province.

Gary Turner, a DFO (Department of Fisheries) biologist, and a small group of concerned anglers initiated a limited stocking program (15,000 smolts) in 1974, '75 and '76. By October of 1976 the river came alive with the best run of salmon since 1967. The grilse (first run salmon) so inspired the local angling community that they dedicated themselves to the full restoration of the river.

As with many conservation projects, the government commitment was slow in coming. Private sector support was even slower. It took twenty-one (21) years of perseverance before local private sector resources began flowing.

Bob Baker, Ron Gauthier and Bob Chiasson were the driving force behind the Nepisiquit renaissance, and to them go our heartfelt thanks for the painstaking effort they made to restore, preserve and protect this sensitive wonderland.

As a result of their efforts I was able to install myself atop the granite walls of the Pabineau Falls, and witness the magnificent leaps of the mighty silver bullets as they shot past me and into the quiet waters upstream.

A large man, camera in hand, dangling over the lip of a waterfall could be consid-



Death comes to sea and shore bird and their chicks when laws regarding 4 x 4 and ATV use of our beaches and sensitive sand dunes are not enforced because the Provincial and Federal Governments refuse to provide adequate funding for policing agencies.

lack of support from the private sector to our appeals for immediate help.

I revel in the opportunities we have as conservationists and nature lovers to become part of a worthwhile effort to conserve and preserve our natural wonders for other generations.



If only Osprey could read? They might not eat the readily available flounder from the contaminated shorelines of the Acadian Peninsula and other important shoals along New Brunswick's coast.

ered a wonderment of nature? To an unsuspecting visitor the first reaction might be: a bear, a log, a dead body, a nut,a nut?

Because the salmon were back and jumping I was able to enjoy and learn from my experience. Not only learn more about conservation commitment, but how this award winning effort is a beacon of enthusiasm and hope. I was awakened to the potential that exists for others to overcome adversity associated with the apathetic response from government agencies and/or the

The Nepisiquit River reclamation project demonstrates how perseverance and a commitment to reversing the impossible can be accomplished.

As I lay there capturing the creations, I could not help but think of how we can apply the same principle of salvation to other shrinking and endangered habitats.

The endangered Nepisiquit butterfly habitats of Beresford, Bas Caraquet and Bertrand are threatened. The once abundant, migratory shorebird, the Red Knot is destined for extinction by 2010. The Piping Plover, already on the “Species-at-Risk” list, recently dropped to its lowest numbers in the Acadian Peninsula. My beloved semi-palmated sandpipers, that were part of my life as I grew-up in Dorchester, are declining at a precipitous rate.

Where will it end? How can we reverse the process?

The Nepisiquit River

A former NHL hockey player, Bob is now a photo-journalist who focuses on environmental issues.

Salmon Association has provided us with a template:

1. Don't wait for the government to provide assistance. Leaders must come forward and be prepared to take a steadfast position to reclaim the environment. Perseverance, knowledge, public education and sound debating skills are critical.
2. Identifying empathic benefactors, whether corporate, private or individual, is key.
3. Establishing a vast network of volunteers to oversee the plan, monitor sites, educate their neighbors and interface with their respective communities is vital.
4. Developing an extensive public awareness network, utilizing all forms of media and an unrelenting educational effort directed at our elected public servants is a powerful tool.
5. Get involved! Once you have the information you must act upon it.
6. Governments need to adequately fund environmental protection programs.
7. Public and private schools must receive funding to develop a K-12 environmental awareness and protection curriculum, hiring the professionals needed to teach it.
8. Because many waterside industries are the primary contributors to our environmental contamination problems, government would be well advised to establish and demand significant contributions to support an environmental educational assistance fund from all industries remotely contributing to the pollution of our environment.

Jack and I have seen the good the bad and the ugly as it relates to our environment. It is our dream and hope that our elected "*public servants*" will also see the destruction around us. Once fertile nesting, feeding and "stop-over" habitat for many of our species of birds, wildlife and fish are in peril.

As parents, can we honestly say we are concerned about the future of our children and grandchildren if we do nothing?

I am a simple guy with a little dog at my side, who writes odes, poems and wake-up calls; I see what's happening in the fields, in our wetlands, on back roads and on our beaches.

There is hope for tomorrow...if we act today!

Many of my photographs are destined for my grandchildren. Many of them will be priceless. Sadly, by the time my grandchildren become adults, these photographs will be of extinct species. I don't want



Observing nature is not only relaxing: it is educational. How can a narrow necked Great Blue Heron swallow an oversized flounder? If you watch long enough the exercise is amazing; First it spears its prey, then it pulverizes it repeatedly, once tenderized it turns the flounder on its head and swallows the pliable fish head first.

to be known as a photographer of "dinosaurs," but I may have no choice.

The Nepisiquit River is my model. The good people who saved her are my heroes.

The heroes of the Petitcodiac, the Acadian Peninsula, Shepody Bay, Mary's Point, Northumberland Strait, Saint John harbor, the Saint John River: who will they be?

The Nepisiquit is a dream come true, Christmas without the lights in late September and October.

I want to lie on the edge – the edge of the Pabineau Falls and watch the salmon jump. They jump when the water is pure, clear, and filled with food. They jump when they are healthy, filled with anticipation of producing the next generation, and free from toxic poisoning. They jump for joy because a few good men led the way with dedication, optimism and perseverance, and saw their commitment through to the end.

Thanks, Bob Baker, Ron Gauthier and Bob Chiasson!

We need more leaders like them. Are you out there?

Call me: Bob Belliveau-Ferrin Lemieux 1-888-345-2211. I have a project waiting for you.