

I'm chasing rainbows out on the Bras d'Or



**JOE FITZGERALD
CHASING PISCES**

The water was absolutely still, like an endless sheet of polished ebony. My mind started sinking into the calm, dark depths, imagining undisturbed legions of fish lolling lazily in the quiet ink.

Suddenly, two screaming rockets ripped me from my drowse, and my attention was focused on the sky. I watched as two huge bald eagles engaged in an aerial dogfight.

One had something in its talons, and after being strafed by the other, dropped its prize into the water below. The attacking eagle immediately dived headfirst and grabbed what I could now tell was a fish in its deadly grip. The epic battle continued as I moved on, until they became two specks in the distance.

What I witnessed is not uncommon around the Bras d'Or Lakes in Cape Breton; it's one of many natural spectacles that occur daily in and around this inland sea.

Unlike other salt-water lakes, like Salt Lake in Utah or the Dead Sea in the Middle East, the Bras d'Or Lakes resemble a giant estuary, with fresh water constantly pumped in from countless streams and rivers, and openings where the briny influence of the Atlantic is

maintained.

For the angler, this combination is Eden, as sea-run freshwater species have a large, protected environment year round, and saltwater species swim alongside, providing premier ocean angling.

About 10 years ago I fished the strawberry run at the St. Peter's Canal, and watched incredulously as angler after angler pulled plump silver sea run speckled trout from the water with dry and wet flies.

The Bras d'Or provides excellent speckled and brown trout angling, but it is also where you are most likely to catch a rainbow — trout, that is.

Rainbow trout, commonly called steelhead in western Canada, are not native to Nova Scotia. They are a western trout, and after being introduced to the province, they established populations in the Bras d'Or system as well as in Antigonish County in rivers such as the South and the West.

I pulled over near a small stream and tried an assortment of streamers in a tiny pool. I was getting strikes, but they were all small brookies. I

went back to the shore of the lake and began casting medium-sized Mepps spinners with pieces of worm on the hooks.

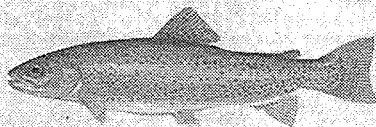
After no luck with a black fury, I tried a slender red iridescent spinner. The gaudy lure produced a strike, and I shook my head at the irony when I landed a silvery rainbow with rosy blush painting its sides, almost identical to the colour of the spinner.

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OF RAINBOWS AND BRAS D'OR



- Rainbow trout are a western species of trout, and were introduced to Nova Scotia in 1899. Although they are stocked in various lakes around the province, there are established wild populations in the Bras D'Or Lakes and rivers in Antigonish County.
- Sea-run rainbow trout are known as "steelhead" in western Canada and are extremely popular sport fish. They are distinguished by a rosy stripe that runs along their sides and black spots that cover their body. Sea-run rainbows become more silvery than ones that spend their entire lives in fresh water.
- Bras d'Or Lake and Great Bras d'Or together make up one of the largest inland seas in the world. Although they're salt water, the lakes actually have lower salinity than the ocean because of the many rivers and streams flowing into them and the protection from the open Atlantic.
- The Bras d'Or lakes are an ideal habitat for species that normally inhabit estuarine environments. Sea-run rainbow, speckled, and brown trout abound, along with smelt, gaspereau, and blue-back herring. Salt water species such as flounder, cod and mackerel flourish, as well.