

Newport Forest

October 1 2000

4:30 - 6:30 pm

Weather: sunny, clear, SW breeze, warm 24C

Purpose: to walk the ravine forest and lunch by the river.

Participants: Pat, Kee

After visiting Eva Newport and sharing some of Pat's elderberry pie with her, we drove to the E corner of the lot, parking on the shoulder of the Fleming Line and going in by a hole in the fence. At first we found ourselves in uninspiring thorn scrub, following an old game trail. To our left was the fence between our lot and the next one (belonging, it is said, to two doctors from Windsor). To our right was a small ravine that gradually deepened. The scrub gave way to more mature trees, including many Bur Oaks and, later, Shagbark Hickories, some of them rather large. In addition, we found Bitternut Hickory, Black Walnut, Sugar Maple, and American Elm, as well as Blue Beech and Ironwood in the understory.

Pat remarked that the bank we followed would be wonderful for spring wildflowers. She called out some of the plants as we went: Zigzag Goldenrod, Wild Ginger, Pale Purple Wood Aster, Anemones (in seed), and Bottlebrush Grass. Along the way, we found some larger-than-normal land snail shells (probably already seen, but collected anyway). We also spotted a small Wood Frog. We seem to see these with more frequency at Newport Forest (on almost half our outings), whereas we would only see them one time in ten (if that) at A'Nowaghi.

In the middle of the ravine, now some 6 m deep and growing deeper as we went, was a channel, itself down to another 2 m deep. There was just a trickle of water in the channel. The late afternoon sun did not penetrate well into the foliage, giving the ravine forest a gloomy and romantic atmosphere that charmed us. Pat was nearing the limits of the energy she could usefully devote to this particular part of our excursion, so she crossed the channel at an open spot, and made her way up the bank into the adjacent meadow, while I continued on down for another 80 m, noting that the ravine, almost suddenly, widened out into a broad, swampy course surrounded by a more expansive forest. Pleased at this unexpected bonus in the purchase of the Newport Forest, we earmarked the area for a whole day's worth of exploration in the near future. It should be possible to walk the bottom of the ravine all the way to Blind Creek and so on to the trail, coming out either entrance.

Finally, I had to climb out as well, finding Pat about 80 m south of me. We went

to the fence, noting that the plants in this meadow were much like those in the east meadow. Some small trees were struggling through the grass and wildflowers, including what looked like an ash, but with a brilliant red stem and twigs. Could that be a White Ash? We also came across several depressed areas where the meadow plants had all, been folded over, possibly by deer yarding up temporarily. Another open area, about 3-4 m across, had not such plants at all, but was covered everywhere, lawnlike, by a small vetch of some kind. We followed the fence to the slip gate, where we let ourselves out.

We next drove into the main gate, down to parking lot, and so off to the river. I retrieved a barn-board plank that I had brought with us (to make a bench during another visit), while Pat remarked that it was time to deal with the many species known collectively to Eva and her family as “river daisies.” She noted specimens to collect later, on our way out.

Along the second leg of Edgar’s Road Pat finally found what may prove to be the long-sought Wingstem, its floral disk more loosely organized than Sneezeweed and its petals drooping in the approved manner. I came to the landing first, startling a magnificent GBH, which took awkwardly off, squawking loudly as it flew across the river. It must have been upset with us for spoiling its evening.

At the River Landing, we set the plank on a grassy bench and sat on the plank, testing it. We took several photos of the river, its treed banks a wonderful golden green in the setting sun. As we munched on our beef and cheese sandwiches, we heard several birds calling, including a Catbird and a Robin. It was getting late, so we reluctantly packed our things and headed back up Edgar’s Road. Pat took samples of various “river daisies.”

We heard a large bird clucking, possibly a Flicker, finally finding it in a distant Walnut. Pat ID’d it through her binos: A Yellow-shafted Flicker. As we came out the upper leg of the Road, I explored the meadow side of the road, hoping to run into some Prickly Ash. Instead, I ran into what looked like the remains of a dead woodpecker, a large litter of chequered feathers scattered about. Fox?

Pat had just come up to examine the find and collect some feathers, when we heard voices on the road nearby. What a shock! Who dared to stroll through our property so casually? The Deputy Mayor of West Elgin, as it turned out. Accompanied by his friend, Elizabeth Sebastyan and her little dog “Millie” (suitably leashed), Graham Warwick somewhat apologetically explained who they were and that Nina had given them permission to walk the forest. I made a joke

about wood chips and how someone had said you had to know the mayor to get anything done. “We’re working on the wood chips,” said Graham Warwick. We chatted for several minutes, but we had to suggest that the trio continue before the light faded entirely. I thought there was just enough time to walk the Hogsback circuit trail.

Getting into the van, we heard a White-breasted Nuthatch croaking its goodbye song to us.