

Newport Forest

May 13 2001

1:50 - 7:00 pm

Weather: sunny with occas. clouds, cool-ish 18C, no breeze

Purpose: to clean and stock trailer and observe birds and butterflies

Participants: Pat and Kee

We knew it was going to be a good day for birding when an Oriole flew over the van on the way in. As we parked by the trailer we could hear a regular cacophony of bird songs. (On this day, I was out of camera film, but Pat was fully loaded.) As we worked in or around the trailer, we spotted a few Turkey Vultures over the UM, as well as several Orioles flying into and out of the BCF. Near the trailer, we spotted an American Lady, a Pearl Crescent, and a Tiger Swallowtail, our first of the season.

While Pat sat watching for birds, I went down to the creek for some water, then proceeded to water the LM trees. The Buckeyes (except one) are doing well. Meanwhile, Pat spotted a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Blue Jay, and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at the Walnut feeder.

We then set out along Edgar's Road, spying a Painted Lady by the edge of the trail in the LM. In the BCF, Pat saw several Catbirds, some bathing in one of the Blind Creek ponds. She also found a Chokecherry in bloom. Accompanied by the odd Red Admiral, I made my way to the RL, while Pat remained behind to watch. She spotted several Blue-winged Warblers and a Yellow Warbler, all drawn by pishing.

As I came to the RL, two Mallards, a male and female, took off from the river nearby. When Pat arrived, she spotted an Oriole's nest in a tall White Elm very close to the river. The nest was about 10 m off the ground and we could see a mother Oriole enter and leave the nest occasionally. We heard a Cardinal calling and also saw another Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Pat thought she glimpsed a Blue-grey Gnat-catcher filching larvae from a caterpillar tent on one of the bushes nearby. Speaking of bushes, she found both Pink and white-flowered honeysuckle bushes growing on the lower River Bluffs near the landing.

Meanwhile, I walked the gravel bars and river flats, noticing for the very first time, a very distinct separation in two soil types. The so-called "Blue Clay" that extends from the river basin to a point two metres above the gravel bars, meets an upper layer of clay loam along a horizontal contact zone that is very narrow and flat. The overlying soil is obviously less well-knit, because it could be seen

surging over the blue clay, like a frozen river of slow custard, covered with grasses and fragmented by recent slumps. I missed my camera!

Pat, meanwhile, saw more birds, including several attractive Cedar Waxwings, a Crow, some Tree Swallows, and at least three Baltimore Orioles. She also noticed a Garter Snake of the blue/grey variety.

At this point, I noticed three young men emerging from the forest across the river in an ATV that towed a boat and trailer. With much labour, owing to the high banks, they succeeded in launching the motor boat and crossed over to where I stood on my invitation, rods and reels at the ready. I greeted the fellows in a friendly fashion and asked if I could record some fishing information. They told me that they had caught Channel Cats, Pickerel, Madtoms (although they didn't know these fish by that name), Smallmouth Bass, Rainbow Trout, and (White?) Sucker. They introduced themselves as Colin Campbell, Andy Welch, and Brian LaRue.

In the course of our conversation, I learned that the land across the river, which belongs to Colin's grandparents, had recently been put up for sale. His grandparents are Lyle and Julie Haggith, both well advanced in age. In recent years their land had been sharecropped, but now they were ready to sell. I asked Colin to convey my best wishes to them and to pass along my opinion that the bit by the river would make a fine conservation property.

After this encounter we returned to the trailer, where we took a drink break before Pat's nap. I caught some movement over in Harvey's Beanfield out of the corner of my eye and directed Pat's attention to a Wild Turkey, her first. During her nap, I planted about 50 of the walnuts that Nina had collected for us last fall. Most of the two basketsful that she gave us had already been eaten by squirrels and other animals during our absence. I planted the walnuts in the lower meadow, well out from the RZ.

Then I went down to the creek, noticing an Oriole bathing in the rapids about 50 metres downstream. A patch of sunlight illuminated its brilliant orange to the point where a blind man couldn't miss it. I then wandered along the bank to count all the different types within a strip 100 metres long and extending from the shore of the creek halfway up the bluffs:

White Elm (dominant): 16 stems, from 3" to 1'10"

Bitternut Hickory: 10 stems, from 6" to 1'5"

White Ash: 6 stems, from 4" to 2' (triple stem)

Hawthorns: 4 stems, from 4" to 8" (two of them already dead)

Black Maple: 3 stems, from 4" to 2'6"

Box Elder: 3 stems, from 8" to 10" (two multiple stems)

Hackberry: 2 stems, both 10"

Walnut: 2 stems, 1' and 1'3"

Shagbark Hickory: 1 stem 2"

Slippery Elm: 1 stem 1'2"

We could therefore characterize this section of the Blind Creek Bluffs as an Elm/Hickory/Ash forest.

Just before leaving, I spotted what looked like a large piece of dirty putty that someone had left stuck to the trailer door. Wait! This was no putty, but a beautiful Grey Tree Frog, a new and completely unexpected species. For the last four years, we have heard them call, but never saw one. The darker islands on this one's skin had shrunk from their guidebook dimensions (possibly a protective colour change to match the trailer), but the overall pattern was the same.