

Newport Forest

August 30 - September 1 2002 2:30 - 2:15/01

Weather: (Au30/02) sunny, clear, calm, LM 30 C; FCF 26 C

Purpose: three-day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

We arrived to find Eva already on site with her two great grandchildren, Jordan and Karissa. Juggling social niceties with camp demands, we unloaded the van piecemeal and put Junior out. The kids watched him eat chicken, then leave for the creek. Eva inspected the sunflower patch which she and the great grandkids had planted (P). Presently, Eva had to go, but not before listening to a few excerpts from my Don Messer tape, saying that she would very much like to have a copy. Shortly after she left, Rob Newport showed up with the kids again. They wanted him to see the raccoon. Rob and I talked about the oil business and his role with Union Energy, with Junior nowhere in sight.

Down at the creek, Pat saw Junior catch (or nearly catch) a toad, letting it get away. We left Junior to roam and drove up to the tree station, where I filled the watering tanks and jugs while Pat ran the auxiliary hose on the trees in the station, watering them liberally. She marveled at the rocklike consistency of the surface soil. Back at the camp, Pat took her afternoon nap, while I went down to the creek, watching Junior forage along the bank and wishing I had my camera with me. (I still haven't learned, after 6 years of this.) Junior appeared to be finding all sorts of things, unidentifiable at the distance, but he ate some of them and acted generally like a kid at a candy store. He was never to return to the camp until dark, our first indication that he was becoming more independent. I found him around sunset, sleeping (or meditating?) up in the White Ash by the bridge. Before Pat woke up, I had watered all the trees in the island.

We had a supper of corned beef hash, marveling at how the most innocuous foods taste good in the fresh air. After supper we walked to the River Landing, hearing or seeing only a few birds (see list at end), including a Catbird, an American Robin, and (as Pat predicted) a Great Blue Heron by the mouth of the creek. Only one or two Cedar Waxwings were around. Apparently, the birds have already started to leave for the south. By the time we got back to the trailer, the sun was setting and we decided to walk together up to the gate. On the way we distinctly heard a Great Horned Owl just to our east give several hoots. We visited Nina and Edgar. Nina gave us a freshly baked loaf of bread and we carried this back down the road through the deepening twilight, trying not to think about the *man in a checked shirt*.* On the way back, we heard a lone Screech Owl

begin to call from Blind Creek Forest. So it isn't strictly true (as some naturalist once told me) that after a GHO calls, all the other owls shut up.

Shortly after we got back, I threw several handfuls of dog biscuits down toward the creek. This was designed to keep the local raccoons busy all night near the creek, so that Junior would have a free hand (paw) in the gallery forest by the trailer. About eleven o'clock I went out to look for Junior, finally finding him sitting on the Hickory bird feeder and dining on some trail mix I had put in the feeder earlier. A half hour later, I went out to see what he was up to, finding him in the same tree, but much further up. At that point, my attention was distracted by strange, small grey/white animals (somewhat smaller than chipmunks) literally flitting along branches and making twittering noises. There was an occasional patter of falling hickory nut hulls. Even stranger, there seemed to be an unusual number of bats gliding past the beam of my flashlight. Only when I saw one of the animals pause on the shaggy trunk, spread-eagled on the bark, did I recognize the animal. It looked rectangular against the bark, a webbing of skin joining front and rear legs. Southern Flying Squirrels! We already knew they were on the site from three other lines of evidence, but here was the first confirmation.

Through the night, Junior came to the trailer twice. On one occasion, he climbed (somehow) onto the roof, descending to the louvres outside my "bedroom" window and chirping. I went out and rough-housed with him for a few minutes, this being his main form of social communication. He then went off, satisfied. I was just getting to sleep about an hour later, when we heard him scratching and whining at the trailer door. "He can't come in and that's final!" Pat's weary voice came from the bedroom in the back. So I went out and rough-housed with him once more. He was biting more forcefully than usual, a sign of increasing "wildness" I thought, hopefully. That was our last contact with Junior for the rest of the night. I got a reasonable sleep, awakening at 7:30 am Sunday morning. Junior poked his head out of the box around 8:00 am.

* our code name for cougars, based on a fleeting glimpse Pat had of a large animal one afternoon.

We had breakfast of Pastrami and eggs, taking our coffee out to the "nook," where Junior joined us for a breakfast of crackers, chicken, and cheetos (one of his favorite "foods.") As Junior ate, a very young Chipmunk (surely this season's brood) joined us to hunt for scraps around the chairs. We also saw two Goldfinches in some "river daisies" just across the "road." There were lots of Blue Jays about, heard more than seen. Two Yellow-shafted Flickers flew across the

meadow and over the gallery forest. Meanwhile, there wasn't a single bird at the feeder, even though we could still plainly see the top of the seed-pile there.

After breakfast, I went down to the creek, finding that Junior was already there, foraging in the shallows. This time I had my camera, musing as I took shot after "naturalistic" shot, that I would tell audiences viewing these slides that the moon was unusually bright that night. (P) Pat joined me in time to witness a Belted Kingfisher flying upstream along the creek, veering off into the forest when it saw us. A lone Ebony Jewelwing flitted below the bridge. Would it be our last one of the season?

I went up to the trailer for a nap from 11:00 am until about 12:30, when Pat came to replace me. She was very excited, saying that she had spotted a cormorant fishing along the bank, a new record for Newport Forest.

I went out, drove up to the tank to fill my jugs and barrels, taking several photographs of the completed station for the record. (P) I then returned to water about 15 trees in the triangle. The Tulip Trees all look very healthy. One of them had nearly packed it in about mid-summer, but was now resprouting from the base. The White Ash trees that we had "parked" along the veg strip bordering Harvey's beanfield last year also got a watering. No trees have been lost since July, thanks to an accelerated watering program. It turns out that each jug holds six litres of water and that we had therefore been giving each tree three litres of water (half a jug) per visit, there being at least two watering visits per week. On recent occasions we had doubled the amount and the trees definitely began to look more vigorous. Apparently, Nic and I had been under-watering them. Perhaps 10 litres a week would be a minimal maintenance number.

About 1:30 (Sunday now) I went to the River Landing alone, spotting the cormorant as soon as I rounded the last bend. I crept on my hands and knees to the edge of the veg and began to snap pictures, creeping closer and closer. At last, I stood up and walked slowly toward the bird until, at about 40 metres distance, it took flight. (P) I also took pictures of the mudcracks along the shore, particularly at the very edge of the river, where whole blocks had been falling into the water. Apparently, this is the mechanism that creates the miniterrace (vertical wall) along the shore line. The surface of the heavy clay soil is harder than the layers beneath, in any case, so the current naturally undercuts the bank, an even more general mechanism that may account for the much larger terraces that caused the French to name our river "La Tranche." Returning along Edgar's Trail, I took several pictures of the Wingstem plants bordering the trail.

Back at the trailer, Pat was still sleeping so I re-organized the Newport Forest file case, recorded a few random thoughts about raccoon foraging behaviour, and made some tracings of Red Oak and Black Maple leaves to cut out later as spray-painting templates (to decorate the trailer).

Weather (2:30) pm: clear, sunny, NE breeze, LM 31 C. FCF 25 C
(felt cooler, thanks to occasional gusts in the breeze)

At about 3:30, Pat arose, had some coffee, then left with me in the van for the long drive to Wardsville, the bridge being out. On the way back, we drove down the Cashmere road where the little village of Cashmere (a.k.a. Suckertown) used to be. The last hundred metres of road has been closed off, now lost in bush. The road veers to the right, instead, forming the driveway of an isolated farm.

Returning along the Fleming Line, we stopped at Janik's field, which Al van Brummel rents from him as a hay field. Nina Hurdle had told us that the field had been historically rich in artifacts. We walked a portion of it, finding nothing of interest, except some curious feathers that we could not identify. Returning to the van, we saw some Wild Turkeys, about a dozen, with one tom in attendance. They flew up into roadside trees as we motored past them. We also stopped to admire some ripening honey Locust pods. (P)

Before supper that night, Pat and I walked into the RSF via the river. We spied a rather large flock of 38 Canada Geese browsing along the shore, all of which took flight with noisy honks when they spied us. We were enroute to the patch of Virginia Bluebells in the RSF, wanting to locate them prior to Jane Bowles' tour with the FBO in two weeks time. We couldn't find them! Pat found what looks like a fairly recent foxhole deep in the woods, however. the soil seemed to be a very fine sand/silt, typical river sediment.

While Pat prepared supper, I relaxed in the nook, watching Junior up in his box. He had stretched out of the opening and placed his chin on the "porch," appearing to be the most contented coon in the world. Shortly after supper, he came down. As the sun set, I walked up to the road to close the gate for the night. (visions of bikers coming to harass us in the middle of the night)

When night was fully descended, I took Junior for a wee walk up toward the deer blind which he promptly visited, scaling the rough bark of the White Oak with ease. (Junior has been a superb climber from the start and unlike our other young

charges, has never fallen. I returned to the trailer, got Pat to come out to see if the flying squirrels were up in the hickory. No sign of them. Pat and I marveled at the clarity of the sky. The Milky Way was clearly visible, rivaling the view up at the island on Lake Windermere. Junior never returned to the trailer all night and we both got a reasonable sleep.

In the morning he came down for breakfast, then went down to the creek. He may have gone up the White Ash for a snooze, but we never saw him again until nearly 2:30, when we broke camp and left the property. At around 12:30, we went up to the water tank to get our last charges of water. Pat drove the van for emergency practice. Down in the LM, we watered the last of the trees in the triangle and watered Eva's sunflowers as well.

Butterfly List: (no locales recorded)

Alfalfa Sulphur; Eastern Tailed Blue; Eyed Brown; Great Spangled Fritillary; Meadow Fritillary; Monarch; Orange Sulphur; Viceroy

Bird List:

American Crow (EW); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (RL); Belted Kingfisher (FC); Blue Jay (GF/LM); Canada Geese (RL); Catbird (BCF); Great Horned Owl (FCF); Mourning Dove (BCF); Northern Cardinal (TR); XX Cormorant (RL); Screech Owl (BCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (TR); Yellow-shafted Flicker (LM); Yellow Warbler (ET) (plus unidentified hawk over LM)