

Newport Forest

Saturday July 2 2005

2:50 - 5:05 pm

Weather: prec. 30 mm*; RH 58 %; clear; calm; LM 26 C; FCF 21 C

Purpose: Three day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

*counted for June

The first thing I noticed when we arrived at the trailer was that the weather vane and anemometer were missing from the top of the weather station. Raccoons? (Later we heard that the latest rain had been accompanied by high winds, so it could have literally blown off.) My dismay at the missing elements was more than compensated for by the presence of 30 mm in the rain gauge.

An inspection of the regen cores confirmed that growth rates varied considerably with species & setting. Some trees (Largetooth Aspens, Eastern Cottonwoods, Tulip Trees showed most growth - many over a foot). While Pat rested, I went out to gather leaves for outlining, running into a Bitternut Hickory leaf that was covered with pimplelike galls. (S) I also found a small orb weaver curled up in a fold of leaf made by its web. (drawing)

After supper we walked to the TR to stroll the beach. I noticed that temporary pools contained very small fry, probably minnows, that had survived in the mud since being deposited there some time earlier. The stands of young cottonwoods on the gravel bars seemed more developed than they did last year. We also noticed that the gravel bars seem to be deepening and extending into the river, leading us to believe that our property is growing, from the bluffs right out to the sand bar at the tip of the point some 300 m downstream. The area near the mouth of Fleming Creek (just east of our property) is simultaneously eroding as far as the beginning of the RL inside the property line.

Before sunset we went to Eva's for a fireworks display for her great grandchildren. We returned to a trailer in darkness. After lighting the lamps, it was enjoyable to chat over coffee, our conversation occasionally interrupted by animal noises from outside. Two kits snarling at each other led to speculations about the number of new families in the area. After Pat went to bed, I went outside after 1 am to look around, finding several flying squirrels in the hickory, presumably enjoying the peanuts we put out on the tray specifically for them. Some arguments broke out between more mature Raccoons, both nearby and in the distance. A lone Great Blue made a "gronking" noise from the creek in EW and every five to ten minutes, a Green Frog called from the creek below the trailer. This brought some lines to mind.

In the darkling wood
The raccoons shriek
And Green Frog plays
 his banjo
 by the creek

The stars, as on any clear night at Newport Forest, were amazing. The Summer Triangle (Cygnus) was overhead, while Scorpio crept along the southern horizon.

In the morning, Steve showed up with a friend called Rick to put the bridge up. By 11 am they were done, taking off shortly after. In the early afternoon the Preicksaitis family showed up for the annual Butterfly Count (Newport Forest Section). The Butterfly census had a good day, according to later reports, finding some 57 spp., a new record for our circle. On the property they found some new species for us, including the Hackberry Emperor and the Dun Skipper. The former specimen was spotted by Jordan Newport. After the butterfly people left, Pat spotted a Tawny Emperor for another new record.

In the afternoon, I gave the trees in the SC regen zone a heavy watering while Pat slept. After supper, we went down to sit on the newly installed bridge and watch the water. There are shallows on the far side where some narrow-leaved pond lilies (but possibly just an emergent shore plant like Saggitaria) floated. Here is the probable hangout of the Green Frog.

After dark, Pat could hear raccoons eating DBs while I was up closing the gate for the night. After I returned, we sat and listened. We heard a sudden, sharp squeaking noise and Pat thought it was a mouse or flying squirrel being predated. I doubted this. I went out at 11:45 to check on things, finding two raccoons on the track eating DBs, while a third stood on the feeding tray in the Shagbark Hickory in what we had come to consider a “hunting posture.” Uh oh! Up to the point where I saw the raccoon descending the hickory with a dead flying squirrel in his mouth, our claim that raccoons' hunted flying squirrels had been conjectural. But here was proof positive. It's ironic that the very thing we did to help the flying squirrels survive should be (indirectly) responsible for their deaths. Such hunting can only be done when there is a localized food source to which the flying squirrels must come and by which the hunting raccoon merely have to wait in ambush.

At 1:30 am I went out again, as several cubs had been whining in the night, as if

to say, “The big guys ate everything!” I threw out more DBs and was pleased to hear, twenty minutes later, the chirping noises of happy little raccoons. In the meantime, I was startled by the appearance of a huge Luna Moth in my flashlight beam. It looked unworldly, ghostlike. It touched the flashlight briefly and then, as though intoxicated by photons, flew up into the night sky to the canopy of the gallery forest. I followed it with the flashlight beam until it disappeared.

Up to this point of our stay we had not found any ticks on ourselves and had begun to wonder whether the ticks were done for the season. No such luck. Just before returning to the trailer I found a tick on the back of my neck. (Final score at end of visit: Pat 3 Kee 2) Shining the flashlight at the tray feeder, I saw a young kit eating seeds (not flying squirrels). It had a solid mask. Air temperature had dropped to about 16 C.

At 8 am the temperature was still 16 C, but the air warmed rapidly after that. The meadow plants dried quickly enough for me to finish another stint of watering by noon. Pat found a geometrid moth on the steps of the trailer deck and it turned out to be distinctive enough (the Barred Itame) to ID immediately from a book. (See new species.) She also saw the (male) Indigo Bunting in EW.

We walked the TRT as far as the bench up on the river bluffs. While Pat stayed to observe, I went into the RSF, hooking brush as I went. I stopped off at the Sandbar, where I watered the two American Hazels, the Witch Hazel and the Pawpaw. (all doing well) I was surprised to see dozens of tail drag marks left by turtles (spiny softshells?) all over the sand. Has the sandbar become a hatchery? (Wait until the raccoons find out!) I hacked my way through dense stands of stinging nettles back to the trail. Up on the Hogsback, I found another family of raccoons in the old Black Maple. There were four kits out sunning themselves (instead of napping, as their mother had instructed).

A sudden crashing noise interrupted my reverie. Another damn tree had fallen over. This depressed me. The “waldsterben” continues and in many places the canopy is opening up again, making our trail work just that much more difficult.

I cut along the trail until I gave up about 300 m short of the entrance, walking out to the trailer for a rest. After a light lunch, we went up to the TS, where I loaded a few extra jugs and Pat cut out shade cloth for the trees and weeded in Bed One.

Back at the trailer, we broke camp, cleaned up and loaded the van for the trip home. A most productive visit, with two disappointments and many pleasant

surprises.

(For bird and butterfly lists, see supplementary sheets.)

New species:

Cecropia Moth	<i>Hyalophora cecropia</i>	TR PD
Luna Moth	<i>Actias luna</i>	Tr KD
Barred Itame	<i>Itame subcessaria</i>	Tr pd/KD
Dun Skipper	<i>Euphyes vestris</i>	RL pd/GP
Hackberry Emperor	<i>Asterocampa celtis</i>	ET jn/GP
Tawny Emperor	<i>Asterocampa clyton</i>	LM PD
“Bitternut Leaf Gall Mite”	unidentified	GF KD
“Small Orb Weaver”	<i>Araneus [miniatus]</i>	GF KD

Note: The Barred Itame belongs to the inchworm (Geometrid) family of moths.

Unidentified: leaf galls on young Bitternut leaves: several to 100 1-2 mm yellow-to-red pimples on upper surface, with corresponding dull spots of same colour on undersurface; galls hollow, inhabited by one to several minute, whitish mites. One might suspect that this organism is normally found on another host, as the list of hickory pathogens did not seem to include it.