

Newport Forest

Wednesday May 3 2006

2:15 - 5:35 pm

Weather: prec. 0mm; RH 23%; clear; NW 10kmh; LM 15° C; FCF 26° C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

At the tree station I filled six jugs, noting that the Northern Leopard frog that we have been seeing here for the last two years was still in business. He has taken on the brown coloration of the area vegetation. He often sits in the little pool under the tank tap, waiting for insects to alight and drink. Will he ever go down to the swamp to reproduce his remarkable self? Would he ever find his way back?

As we pulled up to the trailer, we could hear the frog chorus, not strong, but best yet. Western Chorus Frogs and Spring Peepers, the latter concentrated (if that's the word) at the west end of the BCF.

After settling in the Nook for barely five minutes, Pat found a tick on herself. The evidence is now strong that the tick season is already underway, thanks to the dry conditions. Making the humidity measurement, I was surprised to see the lowest level yet recorded at our little station - 23%!

After I had watered the newly planted trees (only), we took a walk to the River Landing and beyond. Pat spotted a good-sized American Toad on Edgar's Trail at the bend. (We have yet to hear any toad trills.) While Pat sat on the bluffs bench, I proceeded on to the RSF, where I shot a (handheld) video of the Virginia Bluebells, now mostly in bloom. At that point, Pat radioed me to say that she'd heard a Ruffed Grouse drumming behind her on the bluffs. Up on the Hogsback just a little later, I heard drumming from downriver, leading me to conclude that we had potential for two breeding pairs of these birds, now growing increasingly rare in the area. Near the HB bench, I found some "Silver Slime Cushions," a myxomycete that I had seen before, but had yet to ID positively. (See new species, below) It was growing on a half-dead White Ash. It is rated by my slime manual as "uncommon, but widely distributed."

Coming down the Hogsback into the Blind Creek Forest, I startled five full-grown deer, who all ran off, crashing through the underbrush, their tails like white flags. When we got back to the trailer, we found that Eva had dropped by with some cookies. Just before supper, we decided to try the newly erected pipe bridge. On the other side, we were walking toward Eva's Hairpin, when I saw yet another deer crashing off to safety. But this deer was very different. At first I thought it was a fawn because its coat was dappled in white. But two things were wrong: First, there couldn't possibly be any fawns that size

running around at this time of year. Second, the background colour of the coat was not the normal tan colour of a Virginia Deer, but a reddish-brown that looked distinctly out of place. What the hell was it? I even thought of a large cougar cub with its spots still showing. Nope. No long tail out behind. (Sightings like this drive me crazy.)

At sunset, an enthusiastic male Rose-breasted Grosbeak sang of paradise from a dead ash overhanging the creek. He sang, as Pat said, "like a drunken robin."

We had a great supper around sunset and I set out for the gate in the twilight. I dropped by Nina & Edgar's for a little visit, mentioning my mysterious sighting. Nina thought for a minute, then gave me her opinion. "I hear there's several Fallow Deer escaped from a little compound up in Newbury." (Newbury is about 4 km to the N from Wardsville and about 5 km from Newport forest.) Later, I checked the field marks for Fallow Deer and was surprised to see my observation fulfilled. Fallow Deer are about 2/3 the size of Virginia Deer, their coats are dappled with white and have a distinctly reddish cast. I'm taking this as a positive ID. It is not clear how the owner could retrieve his animal in this environment. We shall be keeping our eyes open.

The major Vernal Ponds still have an ample supply of water in them. Throughout the night we heard the Western Chorus Frogs and Spring Peepers calling. Over the night, the air temperature did not drop below 12 celsius. We had brought the raccoon sisters with us and fed them before Pat retired for the night. Clouds came in from the west, gradually obscuring the stars. We arose just before dawn to feed them again and to have our own breakfast. A light rain began shortly after dawn, but it barely laid the dust and amounted to less than 1mm.

weather*: prec. 0mm; RH 61%; hz/sn; SW 15kmh; LM 23C; FCF 22C
* taken at noon, May 4.

I went to the GM plot, finding that the flood had taken three of the four plot stakes. It took an hour to reconstruct the plot. Then I made a more accurate map of the standing wood in the plot than I had made last year. Superficially, it appeared that the systematic cuts were starting to make an impact, but I discovered many small rosettes, just starting out. On the other hand, the rosettes were definitely less dense than in the surrounding area and there has never been such a small number of second-year plants, with about 15% coverage:

When I had finished the GM project for yet another year, I heard a Gray Tree Frog calling nearby and returned to camp. Pat & I then walked to the log

bridge, which Pat crossed very carefully, while I repaired some broken planks at the far end. Back at camp, we cleaned up, loaded the van, and left.

new species:

“Silver Slime Cushion”	<i>Lycogala flavofuscum</i>	HB/KD
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	FCF/E/KD

birds: (35)

American Crow (BCF); American Robin (HBF); Belted Kingfisher (FC); Black-capped Chickadee (FCF); Blue Jay (Tr); Brown-headed Cowbird (BCF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (GF); Common Yellowthroat (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Eastern Wood Peewee Tr); Field Sparrow (UM); Gray Catbird (BC); Great Blue Heron (TR); Great Crested Flycatcher (EW); Hairy Woodpecker (Tr); House Wren (Tr); House Sparrow (UM/Rd); Indigo Bunting (Tr); Killdeer (TR); Mourning Dove (RL); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (EW); Red-winged Blackbird (TR); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Ruffed Grouse (RBlf); Song Sparrow (Tr); Tree Swallow (UM); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); White-throated Sparrow (EW); Wood Thrush (FCF); (no owls!)