

Newport Forest Wednesday August 23 2006

2:20 - 5:50 pm

**Weather:** prec. 11mm; RH 77%; sn/cld; calm; LM 30C; FCF n/a

**Purpose:** two-day stay

**Participants:** Pat and Kee

The girls took their own sweet time to show up, as usual, showing great interest in shreddies, but little in the chicken. After their meal, they relaxed in the Nook, ending with a playfighting session by the lumber pile (V).

We noticed that the upper half on one of the three larger Black Walnut volunteers in the LM had become defoliated. Wandering over to investigate, I found a mass of what I at first thought were tent caterpillars, but there was no tent. They turned out to be Walnut Caterpillars. (See new species.) The LM was very active with insects. We spied two Great Spangled Fritillaries feeding on the same thistle flower, so I took a video. (V)

While the girls dabbled in the lower rapids, we could not forget about the large snapping turtle that Pat had spied in the upper rapids. With some trepidation, I took them to the upper rapids to acquaint them with the danger. It was not a "regular" snapper, having no ridge down the centre of its carapace. Moreover, the tubercles on its light brown tail were green! (algae?) The carapace was about 14" in length. I prodded it to get it to snap, but it refused. I warned the girls by hitting the water with a stick all around the turtle to create a sense of danger. Before we returned to the trailer, Pat found two copulating lady beetles on the bank. (Later, I tried to identify the specimens from notes, but failed; the beetles both had white heads with three black spots. The male had no spots and the female had about twelve, it being hard to see underneath the male.) Pat also found a dead moth on the shore. Later I identified it as a new Geometrid. (See new species.)

Thinking the girls were far away and otherwise engaged, I took the TRT to lay down some dinner for Sonny, thinking to keep him in the area long enough to check on his status at least once. I was crossing the river bluffs, when I noticed a commotion at my feet. I could swear I was not being followed, but here were the sisters, who had somehow tracked me. On this occasion, they did not show the same signs of exhaustion as they did previously. I can't avoid the impression that they follow me not out of "duty," but enjoyment. We found an old heritage apple tree right in the middle of the Beech-maple portion of the RSF, with numerous apples lying about. They were medium-sized and sweetly tart. I made sure the girls tasted them. Up on the HB, I found some thorn apples (*Crataegus succulenta*?) that were faintly sweet. Thelma ate a half-rotted one. I also found a Tremella Jelly. (S) I brought an apple back for Pat to

sample. She said they would make a great pie. But no Sonny, in any case.

After supper I went to the UM to close the gate, dropping in for a visit with Edgar & Nina. On the way back, a young possum crossed the road ahead of me near the gravel pile. It appeared to be coming from the GF and heading into the meadow. Pat went to bed, the girls with her and I sat up, as usual, to work on the day's finds. The Tremella was probably not new. Pat's moth took a long time to locate in the moth book because the pattern on the wings had a lighter colour than the specimen in the book. But it was a Pepper-and-salt Geometer. As I worked at the tiny trailer table, a screech owl calling occasionally from the FCF nearby. I also worked on an article on my laptop, but the battery gave out after an hour. (These are happy times, nevertheless!)

Morning brought a good 6mm rain, followed by a slight clearing and the arrival of visitors. The Murrays brought their friends Carol Clarke and Christine Leupen, as well as Christine's mother and two children, Christine brought eight young skunks that she had reared under an MNR certificate. We released them on the drift pile near the RL. The pile is laced with holes and subterranean passages, ideal as habitat for one or two of them, perhaps. The rest were guaranteed to disperse, according to Christine. The skunk kits come from two litters with the same numbers of males and females, overall. Meanwhile, Ken went looking for Sonny, ending in yet another disappointment.

We all went back to the trailer and said goodbye. The girls had made themselves scarce, so we busied ourselves looking for new moths and other insects. We found a Forage Looper Moth (new) and a wonderful Io Moth (not new) caterpillar on a partially defoliated Large-tooth Aspen. It has poisonous green spines on its back. Around 2:00 pm I heard a gunshot followed by a roar over in the FCF. Another dead Bitternut had fallen over! It occurred to me that we have almost enough data to estimate how many have fallen over since the beetle infestation began. I collected a stem gall from a cottonwood that was replete with them, but (later) failed to ID the species that made the galls. Pat spotted what at first appeared to be an all-black soldier beetle. I sketched the elytra, pronotum & head. Later, I discovered that it was not a soldier beetle at all, but a Margined Blister Beetle, common in the Great Lakes region and further south.

Pat and I walked down to the RL, then to the bluffs bench. We watched some Cedar Waxwings catching insects over the river and Pat spied a new leaf-footed bug. (See new species.) In the middle of this, we were startled by the approach of a young skunk, who sniffed the air, stared at us myopically for a minute, then trundled off. It had already wandered a good 50m from the

release site.

While at the bench, Pat also found a caterpillar of the Milkweed Tussock Moth (See new species.) We continued our walk into the “new” forest, then returned the way we had come. Back at the trailer the girls were still not in evidence, so we cleaned camp, loaded the van left them some dinner, and departed.

**Nirds:** (21)

American Crow (UM); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (LM); Blue Jay (GF); Cedar Waxwing (TR); Common Grackle (LM); Common Yellowthroat (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (LM); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Great Blue Heron (EW); Gray Catbird (BCF); Eastern Screech Owl (EW); Eastern Wood Peewee (BCF); Mourning Dove (FCF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (UM); Song Sparrow (LM); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF);

**New species:**

Striped Skunk	<i>Mephitis mephitis</i>	RL KD
Leaf-footed Bug	<i>Acanthocephala terminalis</i>	RBIf pd/KD
Margined Blister Beetle	<i>Epicauta pestifera</i>	LM KD
Walnut Caterpillar	<i>Datana integerrima</i>	LM KD
Forage Cabbage Looper	<i>Caenurgina erechtea</i>	LM/HBF KD
Pepper-and-salt Geometer	<i>Biston botularia cognataria</i>	LM KD
Milkweed Tussock Moth	<i>Euchaetes egle</i>	RBIf PD

**Phenology:** Rose-breasted Grosbeaks gone? Blue Asters beginning to bloom.