

Newport Forest

Monday November 27 2006

2:30 - 5:10 pm

Weather: prec. 0mm; RH 85%; hz/sn; SSW 0-15 kmh; LM 14C; GF 14C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

Not long after we arrived, Pat found the missing cellphone under the big walnut at the edge of HBF. I retrieved the missing bridge keeper from an eddy pool below the lower rapids, then went on downstream to look for the missing deck section. On the way I ran across the (former) farside trestle lying on a terrace about 100m downstream from the rapids. Then, much further downstream, I spotted the deck section sitting on a drift jam about 100m upstream from the mouth of the creek. I retrieved the trestle, but I couldn't reach the jam. I noted, as I tramped through the woods, that day-flying moths were about, one investigating my head for a few minutes. Later we would see several wasps, flies, and even a Question-mark butterfly in the LM.

Relaxing in the Nook, I spotted what I thought was a small, red-phase Eastern Grey Squirrel running up the trunk of the BM, darting into a hole about 30' up. Could that be Charlie? Pat didn't think so. She saw it later and ID'd it as a Red Squirrel. Although normally Red Squirrels inhabit coniferous woodlands, we have seen them on the property just often enough to know them as occasional visitors. Has this one taken up residence? Later, Pat saw it enter the squirrel box we put up a month ago. But where was Charlie? We see very few Eastern Greys on the property as it stands, always black phase animals. But Pat also spotted a grey-phase squirrel further along the GF. If any squirrel was Charlie, it was that one.

After supper I went up to close the gate and to investigate Nina's claim that she had seen three young skunks as roadkill along the Fleming Line (or so I thought she said). I walked all the way to the end of Janik's, seeing no roadkill of any kind in the beam of my searchlight. On the way back, Randy Ovecka and her son came driving along. We chatted a bit. I stopped by to visit Nina & Edgar. It turned out that Nina meant she had seen the roadkills at various locations far from the property.

At 11 pm while Pat slept, I walked the TRT, noting that the forest was unusually quiet. No owls. No coyotes. No nothing. The half moon hid behind the overcast, but succeeded in providing a diffuse glow under which I could barely make out the trail ahead. (flashlight off) The Thames is currently running clear to at least a foot. The flashlight revealed bottom. Fleming Creek is also running clear now.

The overnight low (2am) was 8 C, giving us a very comfortable trailer. We would never have thought it possible to have an overnight stay this late in the year, but supernaturally warm weather helped. At 1 am, I sat out on the deck watching Greylock systematically gobble up the kibbles scattered in front of the trailer. He looks quite fat. This being (more or less) Greylock's stamping ground, we think he may have been responsible for running the girls off. Still, you have to love Greylock, with his short, puggy face and furtive eyes.

By noon on Tuesday, the temperature soared to 16C. Pat had spent the better part of the morning birdwatching down at the hole, adding several new birds as a result. The sparrows seem especially fond of wild Clematis and Bladdernut seeds. A gold-crowned Kinglet came to feed just inches from her feet and she got a very good close-up look at it. At one point she walked down to the river, seeing a Canada Goose sleeping on the beach (now shallows). Behind the goose she could see the young cottonwoods emerging as the river dropped. As she walked across the drift pile at the RL, a small black animal suddenly leapt from a small tree in front of her and darted across the path ahead too quickly to make out. From her description, I thought it was about the size of a Mink, which normally appear dark. On the return walk, she spotted another Red squirrel.

Note: We have never seen as many squirrels active on the property as we have of late.

In the early afternoon, we decided to take one more trip in the canoe before taking it back to London for the winter. This time we would travel from the upper rapids on FC downstream to retrieve the deck section and, possibly, beyond to the river. At Eva's Hairpin Pat spotted a Great Blue Heron. We must have scrambled under or over six drift jams, most a tangle of branches and trunks and very awkward to pass. Still, the water ran merrily enough and clear, making for a few pleasant stretches between jams. When we came to the jam where the deck lay, we had to pull the canoe right out of the water and portage around the tangle. In the process, Pat spotted a large twig nest at the top of a large Sycamore that perched precariously on the high bank, half its roots dangling in the water. I could not retrieve the deck with my rope-and-crowbar arrangement, so we tied the rope to a nearby tree and proceeded through two more jams to the open water of the Thames, bringing the canoe in at the (very narrow) landing.

We took a long break after the trek. While we sat in the Nook, a Sharp-shinned Hawk flew boldly in to perch for a few seconds on a lower branch of the BM

before abruptly flying on. The Chickadees sounded a warning note and after that we saw very few birds about. We packed up, tied the canoe to the top of the van and were off.

Birds: (19)

American Goldfinch (LM); American Crow (RSF); American Robin (FCF); American Tree Sparrow (LM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (FCF); Brown Creeper (HI); Canada Goose (TR); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Gold-crowned Kinglet (HI); Great Blue Heron (EH); Hairy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (LM); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (EW); Sharp-shinned Hawk (GF); Song Sparrow (HI); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF)

Notes:

1. "HI" means The Hole, where ET enters the BCF. Three habitats merge here, making it a fine bird-watching spot.
2. "EH" means Eva's Hairpin, a 180-degree bend in the creek about 80 m downstream from lower rapids.
3. No chipmunks this visit. Hmmm. A preferred food item for Mink.

New species: (Malaise)

Big-headed Fly	Fm. Pipunculidae	LM nz/KD J118/05
Common Yellowjacket	<i>Vespa maculifrons</i>	RL nz/KD J131/05
Braconid Wasp	[<i>Rogas</i> sp.]	RL nz/KD J131/05