

Newport Forest

Tuesday March 27

2:35 - 8:00 pm

weather: prec. 12mm; RH n/a; calm; ovcast; LM 25C; GF 25C

purpose: site check

participants: Pat & Kee

The ground was very squidgy coming in, so we parked at the top of the property where the gravel pile used to be and carried in our supplies, using the wheelbarrow for the last stretch. While collecting the wheelbarrow, I spotted a Brown Snake out hunting by the brush pile (dead limbs from large bitternut tree nearby).

We could hear the frog chorus even louder than on my previous visit. Several young chipmunks shuttled back and forth between the tray feeders and their home nests, occasionally engaging in chase-play. A flight of five Wood Ducks passed over the LM, calling “Wheep-wheep,” sounding alarmed.

We walked the TRT, proceeding to the river to find it well over its lower bank and edging to the foot of the landing itself. A pair of Mallards flew off downriver, quacking in irritation. On the bluffs, right beside the trail, a Coltsfoot flower had just opened. Further on, in the new forest section of the TRT, we found the new shoots of Virginia Bluebells (purple at this stage) poking up everywhere (about 1” high).

At this point, we wandered off-trail with the intention of following the shoreline as far as the giant Blue Ash to check for seeds. On the way, we encountered a beautiful old snag, so picturesque that I had to photograph it. (2P) The area where we had planted the American Hazels and Witch Hazels in recent years was now flooded by the river -- under 2-3’ of water.

The Blue Ash seemed to have left us no seed this year. Continuing on, we found ourselves at the lower end of the game trail (raccoons & skunks) that runs between the BCF and the RSF (over the HB). This is the same trail that I had been examining for tracks over the winter. A dead raccoon, now half-decayed, told a sad tale of winter starvation or predation -- we couldn’t be sure which. We decided to follow the game trail back up and over the Hogsback. On the upper slope of the HB, near the top and overlooking the BCF, Pat found a cluster of Harbinger of Spring, a new species for us. The plant is provincially rare.

By the time we got down to the floor of the BCF, the chorus exceed in volume

what I had heard two days ago. Listening carefully, we could also hear Spring Peepers interspersed with the Western Chorus Frogs. Pat spotted what we at first thought were some Devil's Urns on a mossy, trailside log. (S) But they turned out to be young Striated Birds' nest fungi that had already been found last summer. Pat pointed out the song of a lone Eastern Towhee calling from the HB slope above us as we exited onto Edgar's Trail. An Eastern Cottontail fled the Hole as we emerged onto the LM once more.

As we were closing up camp, Pat pointed out that an American Woodcock was calling from the edge of Eva's woods. In the Upper Meadow we heard one or two more. Then we got stuck near the gate and Edgar had to come with the tractor and pull us out.

As might be expected at this time of year, the bird list has begun to lengthen once again.

birds: (21)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (LM); American Woodcock (HBF); Black-capped Chickadee (LM); Blue Jay (FCF); Brown Creeper (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (BCF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Mallard (TR); Mourning Dove (LM); Northern Cardinal (Tr); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Red-winged Blackbird (GF/UM); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (UM); Tufted Titmouse (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wood Duck (LM)

new species:

Harbinger of Spring *Erigenia bulbosa* HB PD Mr27/07

phenology:

Coltsfoot blooming; Virginia Bluebells emerging from soil; Eastern Towhees, Tree Swallows, and Red-winged Blackbirds are back