

Newport Forest

Tuesday April 10 2007

2:30 - 5:30 pm

weather: prec. 0mm; RH 52%; sn/cld; calm; LM 7C; GF 6C

purpose: trail maintenance

participants: Kee & George Nicholas

We had scheduled a burn in the WM today, but Brian had another commitment and Steve's truck died this morning. I took George "Joe" Nicholas with me, instead. We went down to Moraviantown to visit Steve, then returned to the property via Longwoods and Clachan Road, arriving from the west. As I opened the gate, I happened to glance up and spotted a strange-looking animal just sitting on the track (ER) at the crest of the rise just before the mudhole. It was black. My first thought was of a tom turkey, as you sometimes see them on the road. But it didn't have the right shape. Then I thought it might be a very dark coyote (it was about that size & shape). I didn't use my binos because I wasn't all that curious.

We drove in but, as we passed the water tank, the animal calmly turned and walked off, disappearing into the dip before the mud hole. When we got to the point where it had been sitting, it was nowhere in sight.

We opened camp and gathered tools for trail work, a shovel and a trowel, the idea being to move the Virginia Bluebells (VB) off the new section of trail in the RSF. On the way, I stopped to take a depth reading from the stake that I had planted in VP2 during the previous visit. It now read 23cm, instead of 13 cm, a drop of ten cm in just three days. (not good) We relocated about 50 plants and surveyed the area, finding two more large patches of Bluebells. My estimate of the total number of VBs in the immediate area was over 5000 plants! We broke for a quick lunch of baloney sandwiches & apple juice. Joe spotted some wild leeks nearby, plucking a couple of leaves to insert in his sandwich. I did the same. The flavour was great! We then moved on to line trail in the RSF, then up on the HB. By then it was getting late, so we decided to come out.

As we emerged from the Hole into the LM, Joe said. "Look. There it is again. It's a cat! A big cat!" The animal was calmly descending the hill beyond the power lines, coming toward us. I watched it pick its way down the hill, but still couldn't be sure, the animal being nearly 300m away at that point. Suddenly aware that it could have been a cougar all along, I rummaged feverishly in my bag for the binos, not finding them until the animal had disappeared into the shallow depression at the base of that hill. We double-timed to the trailer, where I grabbed

a bag of DBs and crept as quietly as I could to the rise of the lower hill that forms the near side of the depression. Again, nothing to be seen, so I left a generous supply of DBs, thinking to encourage the animal to stick around.

“Are you sure about the cat thing?” I asked Joe. He was sure. Not a barn cat? “You saw it,” he said. “Way too big.” But it was certainly not a full-grown cougar*, so I have to wonder if it was a subadult -- about 2/3 full size. Black-phase cougars are born black, so it would not have the spots of a young (tan-phase) cougar. Holy moley!

birds: (12) (casual, non-intensive)

American Robin (RSF); Belted Kingfisher (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (Tr); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Hairy Woodpecker (RSF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Song Sparrow (BCF); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF)

new species: (Malaise trap 2005)

Striped Horsefly

Tabanus lineola

LM nz/KD J118/05

*given the relative rarity of these animals, I'd need a closer look before confirming it on the property.