

Newport Forest Saturday April 21 2007 2:15(Sat) - 6:40 pm (Sun)

weather: prec. 0mm; RH 39%; clear; calm; LM 25C; GF 26C

purpose: two-day stay

participants: Pat & Kee

We stopped at the tree station on the way in to drop off some shade-cloth. The small-game trail that runs past the water tank has been worn absolutely smooth, indicating heavy daily (nightly) traffic on it since winter. I had noted during the winter that it always seemed to be in use. Does it still lead to the beanfield across the road?

Setting up camp, we first checked to see if the baby raccoons were still in the box behind the trailer. They were. We took several hours during this visit to give the trailer a good housecleaning, birding during breaks. During one of these, Pat spotted a YB Sapsucker working a tree close to the Nook, so she could watch and admire it for several minutes at a time. At first, we heard no frog chorus from the Blind Creek Swamp, but later several Spring Peepers, accompanied by the odd western Chorus Frog, started to call.

A Mourning-Cloak Butterfly flew by the Nook before I set out down the trail to the creek. While Pat cleaned, I sawed through three of the four Bitternut logs blocking the trail. Thanks to the drought/Scolytus beetle combination, we have lost close to 100 mature Bitternuts (and a major food source for squirrels of three different species). Trail maintenance has also become nearly a full-time occupation on site, because of the many downed Bitternuts, severally across trails. I returned to the trailer to take my turn: sweeping and washing the trailer floor.

We set out for the river, noting that the BH Cowbirds were back. The recently installed depth gauge at VP3 read 35 cm, down another 12 cm since last week. Total drop in water levels over two weeks is now 22 cm. At this rate the vernal ponds will be entirely dried up by mid-May, leaving in doubt the survival of this year's crop of larval amphibians. At the river we noted the Thames running much clearer now, with bottom down to two feet being visible. Pat spotted a very young (5") Brown Snake out hunting in the sward by the landing. The gravel bars have now emerged with their rows of cottonwoods, but the clay beach is still submerged.

We saw some footprints on the shore and a canoe keel mark at the landing. One individual was wearing rubber boots. We reconstruct the "visit" as follows. Two

men landed a canoe. One, wearing rubber boots, walked along the shore toward the rapids, then climbed the bluff for some reason. He may have continued on to the rapids nearby, so the other relaunched the canoe to pick him up. Why did they stop? I didn't know for sure until I walked the bluff trail next day. The guy who had climbed the bluff had apparently cut down a young alder (?) to make a pole about 1.5" in diameter and several feet long, leaving the top of the tree across the trail. On our way back from the Landing, we saw our first Bee Fly of the season humming around the drift pile. Near the Blind Creek bench, I saw our first (6-spotted) Tiger Beetle of the season. I tried to take a video, but had trouble with the camera's focus (must practice that).

Back at the trailer, we both discovered ticks on our person. (By the end of our visit -- including home discoveries -- the score was Kee: 5; Pat 3.)

It was apparent by this point that we had gone straight into summer from winter, with nary a day of spring in between. As we worked to finish cleaning the trailer, we would pass in and out, spotting something new almost every time. Pat spotted our first Anglewing Butterfly of the season. We both saw a Meadow Jumping Mouse bound across the road from the hickory tree to the Lower Meadow. Then some American Toads joined the swamp chorus, adding their magical trills.

Around sunset, I headed up to close the gate, hearing several Woodcocks buzzing over by the East Ravine, as well as a couple of Leopard Frogs calling in the Hurdle Pond. Talking with Edgar & Nina, I was somewhat dismayed to learn that Edgar had trapped and shot one of our skunk releases. (I said nothing, as we had not told the Hurdles about last summer's releases by rehab friends.)

While I was away, Pat rested in the bedroom, delighted to hear the mother raccoon visiting her babies in the box next to the trailer wall. Later, when she went outside for a look, she spotted the mother with a companion of about the same size. Later that evening, I had a good look at the pair, glad to recognize the "Stripe Sisters," Shortstripe and Longstripe (mother of Thelma and Louise). Around midnight a Great Horned Owl began calling from the Blind Creek Forest, keeping it up for a good 15 minutes. (The overnight low was a mere 2 degrees.)

Around 9:30 in the morning, Steve Logan dropped by to unload some deck furniture he had made for Pat, staying for breakfast of beef bacon & eggs. Steve told us of a blue truck he had seen parked on the road as he came in, giving me the license number. Shortly after Steve left, two fishermen walked out of the woods and across the meadow, carrying a string of freshly caught pickerel. I

intercepted the pair, ascertained the blue truck to be theirs and warned them about the no trespassing and no fishing rules. They promised to “respect” the rules in future. (Uh-huh.)

I inspected the trees in the regen zone, suspecting that most of the smallest ones had died. But a scratch test revealed that 90 percent were still healthy. The Yellow Birch and Black Cherry trees are now in the mid-leaf stage and the Tulip Trees have just started to break bud. Along the trail, the Chokeberries are at about the same stage as the Black Cherries.

In the early afternoon, I planted two very young Box Elders that Pat had brought from our tree bed at home. I plan very little planting this season, otherwise. I then walked the Thames River trail, noting five deadfalls blocking the trail on the river side of the Hogsback and four more deadfalls on the Blind Creek side, all of them Bitternuts. I heard a few Leopard Frogs calling from VP 8 or 9. I took a surface scum sample from VP 2 to check for new species later at home.

At the very end of our visit, Pat and I took the trail down to the creek, noting the loss of a lower terrace to erosion downstream. Both Tulip Trees came through the winter unscathed, thanks to the steel-stake ice-stoppers Steve and I had driven on the upstream side of the young trees last November. Two of the three Pawpaws are still in action. Pat found what I thought (for sure) was a Tremella-like fungus growing on grass and moss. She thought it might be clusters of salamander eggs - or something similar. Pat turned out to be closer than I was. (actually insect eggs)

birds: (33)

American Crow (GF); American Goldfinch (Tr); American Robin (LM); American Woodcock (UM); Belted Kingfisher (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (Tr); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (GF); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (EW); Field Sparrow (UM); Great Blue Heron (LM); Great Horned Owl (BCF); Hairy Woodpecker (GF); Mallard (LM); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Northern Harrier (EW); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-winged Blackbird (HP); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (BCF); White-throated Sparrow (Tr); Wild Turkey (FCF); Wood Duck (BCF); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (GF); Yellow-shafted Flicker (BCF)

new species:

Redback Salamander *Plethodon cinereus* FCF GT My29/05
Red-spotted Newt *Notophthalmus viridescens* v. FCF GT My29/05
[two species that Greg Thorn noticed while turning logs in search of fungi in the
FCF -- but neglected to tell us about]

Malaise species

Deer Fly *Chrysops frigidus* LM nz/KD J118/05
'Big-headed Blow Fy' *Chrysomya [megacephala]* LM nz/KD J118/05

Collected this visit

'Deadleaf algae' *Binuclearia tatrana* VP KD Ap22/07
[Ulotrichaceae]

phenology:

First Leopard Frog chorus; Brown-headed Cowbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks
back, White-throated Sparrows flying through, first Mourning Cloak Butterfly,
first Bee Fly; first Anglewing; half the Trout Lilies in full bloom (both yellow
and white varieties); scattered Spring Beauties in full bloom