

Saturday Ramble

Newport Forest Saturday April 18 2009 2:05 - 7:45 pm

weather: prec. 11 mm; RH 40%; BP 29.42 KPa; sn/hz; 20 kmh SW; T 26° C
purpose: Checking spring ephemerals & birdwatching
participants: Pat, Kee

It was nice to have a welcoming Committee of two Tree Swallows on the farm gate to greet us today, a breeding pair that have taken up housekeeping on the bluebird trail. Down in the LM and in the BCF, the first signs of butterfly resurgence were everywhere: Mourning Cloak, Spring Azure, Cabbage White, and An Eastern Comma. The Brown-headed Cowbirds are back, as well, and Pat had to deliver a stern warning about nest parasitism. Mrs Cowbird only pretended to listen, out of courtesy.

I changed the trail cam cards (nothing special to report) and we went to the river, noting the slow emergence of the near-shore gravel bars from the sullen, brown currents. The Muskrat has been using the entire length of the trail leading down to MB as his run; the grass is all slicked down and shiny.

We went on to inspect the bluebells, finding that about 10 percent had already developed flower spikes, but still early in the blooming process (see image below). As well, we found both races of Trout Lilies, the yellow and the cream-coloured ones, already fully bloomed, along with Bloodroot and Spring Beauty. The Trilliums are still a week or two away yet. Although Pat intended to return forthwith to the trailer, the emerging grandeur lured her ever on, like a siren spirit, until she finally climbed the Hogsback without benefit of trail and became somewhat lost. Or perhaps it was me that was lost. Note: You can't tell where someone is by walkie-talkie, nor can you tell where you are. Anyway, she was looking for the Harbinger of Spring patch, but missed it

Later, down at the creek, I found a perfectly good canoe paddle among the flood branch-drift on our side of the water. I hope all is well with the (former) owners!

We have noticed deep in the woods that there are a few bird calls that we are still unable to identify. Once we have these, our bird lists are likely to expand a bit. The volume of chorus frogs continues sparse, raising the probability still further that some winterkill occurred. Throughout the BCF one doubts that more than 15 Western Chorus Frogs are calling in the BCF vernal ponds -- compared with perhaps a hundred in previous years.

The Red Squirrel, which has been visiting the camp regularly for the last two months was nowhere in evidence today, but chipmunks were. (One wonders about some kind of mutual exclusion going on.) After supper we went to the UM before sunset to see if the Woodcocks would display. They weren't in the mood.

birds: (21)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (GF); American Tree Sparrow (GF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (BCF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (FCF); Common Flicker (Rd); Common Grackle (HBF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (BCF); Mourning Dove (EW); Northern Cardinal; (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GEW); Red-winged Blackbird (UM); Song Sparrow (BCF); Tree Swallow (UM/rd); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (WM); Wood Duck (FC/TR)

Note: sometimes things occur to us that should perhaps be on record somewhere. What better place than these reports? Today's thought concerns global warming and its local implications. Some climatologists have warned of the potential for severe drought in our area. We have already had 10 or 11 very (very) dry years out of the last 15. If this trend continues, there is likely to be a major ecological shift at places like Newport Forest. Maples, ashes, elms and beeches will start to go first, perhaps, with some species of oak soldiering on, thanks to drought tolerance. What does Jane think? What would Don Craig predict? (TBC)

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



*greeted by the Tree Swallows
(who just sat right there as
we walked through the gate)*

(click on image to enlarge)



*bluebells early in their bloom
period*

(click on image to enlarge)



our race of cream trout lilies

(click on image to enlarge)



*Finally, some big, bold
Bloodroots*