

Two Day Stay Nets Birdwatching

NewNewport Forest Sunday October 25/26 2009

weather: prec. 14mm; RH 70%; BP 99.4 KPa; SW 5-15kmh; sn/hz; T 21° C
purpose: two-day stay
participants: Kee

After setting up camp, I walked the TRT (Thames River Trail), stopping at the river when I heard numerous robins calling excitedly. At first I thought maybe there were a dozen, then I realized there were at least thirty, Then a huge flock of well over 100 robins flew up from the trees across the river, en masse. I had never seen so many robins in one place before. The flocking rivaled that of the grackles! (Does this mean we're going to have a hard winter or something?) In any event, watching the spectacle from the bench on the bluffs, I wondered what attracted them all to the river. Was it the abundant crop of near-shore invertebrates?

Passing through the RSF (Riverside Forest), I was startled by a flash of reddish brown across my path, fast enough for a bird in flight, but I've never seen a bird of that particular colour. Only other possibility was a Red squirrel leaping. Seated up in the HB (Hogsback), I was delighted to see old Lotor back in the crotch of the ancient Black Maple, where a natural bowl-shaped depression has formed -- excellent for sunning oneself. Lotor yawned & scratched. (2P) As I descended into the BCF (Blind Creek Forest) I heard the pock-pock-pock of a chipmunk back up on the heights. ("Good Riddance!") All along this walk I had noticed threads of spider web across my path. They were not bridge-lines such as some spp of spider leave in place to hang the next day's web from. It was, I thought, "gossamer," threads that wind-bourne spiderlings can travel on.

My way down to the swamp forest was blocked by yet another Hickory deadfall. The hickory dieback has cost us a lot of effort and money -- just to keep the trails open. And as the canopy itself opens, trails become that much harder to maintain, with higher light levels and enhanced veg encroachment. Somewhere an Eastern Gray made a mocking call. (Beatrix Potter School of Ecology) One good thing about the fall dieback of herbs is that planted trees once again become visible. I found an American Beech which we had planted off trail several years ago -- doing well, its leaves coppered. Further along I found a small troop of Shaggy Manes (2P).

Back in camp, I was glad to see a Tufted Titmouse at the Nook tray feeder. we see these birds just often enough to regard them as an endemic species, though by no means abundant. A new species of snout beetle landed on my person, so I moved it to the table to photograph. (P) I had invited Steve & Karen Logan to join me for a deluxe hillbilly meal of hamburgers in the trailer. They showed up at five, the rest being a social visit filled with details that are irrelevant to this report. At the end of our feast, Steve and I stepped out of the trailer to find a mammal on the track that I had never seen except during a release we had permitted several years ago. *Mephitis mephitis*, the smelly one, was browsing the track! (2P) I theorize that skunks are rare on site because winter/spring floods would tend to drown burrowing animals.

Apart from the sound of an argument down by the creek (heard by Steve), there was no evidence of raccoons for the rest of my stay. One can't help thinking that if, over the same period, you see an animal you never see, conjoined with the nonappearance of an animal you always see, there is a connection. Who knows? Later on, after my guests had departed for Moraviantown, I spotted a Southern Flying Squirrel on the tray feeder by the trailer. I hadn't seen this species since last April. (We would almost always see them during overnight stays.)

After sunset the sky had clouded over, then by midnight clear again, with fall constellations on a slow march. Air temp dropped to 6° C and the flying squirrel came back for peanuts. Come morning, I decided to spend it birdwatching. Pat always advises against my impatience. "Just sit and you'll see plenty." It was true and birds were calling everywhere. Woodpeckers were abundant (thanks in part to the hickory dieback). Between birds I mentally calculated the rate of leaf loss in the Gf, concluding that the equivalent of one tree per hour was being denuded of leaves. Walking up the hill to make a cellphone call, I was startled by a gigantic, shrieking woodpecker flying along the top of the Gallery Forest (GF) toward the east -- another animal we hadn't seen since 2007.

Down by the creek I heard the Yellow-billed Cuckoo calling from the Fleming Creek Forest. This is ideal habitat for the bird and no, it doesn't migrate until "late in the fall." By noon the sun was out again as the sky cleared and the air temp climbed to 19° C. Before breaking camp, I spent an hour with bird books trying to ID a difficult visitor. (see list below)

birds: (19.5 -- including 5 woodpecker spp.)

American Crow (HB); American Goldfinch (Nk); American Robin (RL); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Brown Creeper (GF); Canada Geese (LM); Common Flicker (ERv); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Screech Owl (FCF); Hairy Woodpecker (GF); Mourning Dove (Tr); Pileated Woodpecker (GF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (LM); White-throated Sparrow (GF) Yellow-billed Cuckoo

note: I'd like to add "Chipping Sparrow," but the individual seemed too large for that species -- yet not the American Tree Sparrow, either (no stick-pin). Other field marks good for either.

phenology: goldenrod entirely in seed; White-throated Sparrows arrive

new species:

'Common Fungus Weevil' *Euparius marmoreus* Tr KD Oc26/09

Note: I took a picture of a paper wasp drinking some spilled coffee on the Nook table. Later at home, I tried to ID it, the only match being a more southern wasp called the Yellow-legged Paper wasp (*Mischocyttarus flavitarsus*). This was highly unlikely, so I sent the image to Steve Marshall for assistance. Anyone know a Polistine-type wasp with pink wings, yellow legs, dorsally black thorax and a blackish (banded) abdomen in which the first 2-3 segments are yellow?

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



This fungus weevil sports an attractive dappled pattern

(click on image to enlarge)



Shaggy Mane is a distinctive mushroom -- covered with scales

(click on image to enlarge)



Unhygienic Raccoon wades in watering tub in the predawn last Saturday (note: night images are shot in B&W, daytime in colour.