Planting Time!

Newport Forest Sunday April 25 2010 1:45 - 2:50 pm

weather: prec. 12 mm; RH 78%; BP 96.4 kPa; calm; ovcst; T 12° C

purpose: planting trees participants: Kee, Will

We had hoped that Darren would show up, but guessed that he never got back from the Bruce Peninsula in time. There had been a few episodes of light rain on the way down, but nothing fell during our stay on the property.

The first thing I noticed when we got to the Lower Meadow was that the Towhees had reverted to their "Drink your tea" call. And they seemed to call from everywhere. If there is to be a totem bird for Newport Forest, it should be the Eastern Towhee. It was the first bird we saw on our initial visit to the property in April of 2000. We had never even seen a Towhee before that.

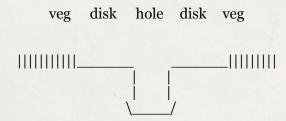
We dug 21 holes-with-disks and planted what I thought were ten Shagbark Hickories and ten Bitterrnut Hickories.* (I told Will to place the new trees randomly in the holes before we filled them all in.) Later, we planted a beautiful Serviceberry near the trailer. On reviewing the nursery invoice, however, I forgot that we had also picked up five Swamp White Oak -- which I had intended to plant in the Blind Creek swamp. Well, they may take anyway. Stranger things have happened. I have planted trees that, according to the literature, should have been happy, but died. Others that had no right to live there, so to speak, thrived and grew well.

It may be asked what our general plan is. There isn't one. At first we used the Regeneration Zone (or RZ, as we call it affectionately) as a dumping ground for the trees we had been growing at home. Not surprisingly, none of the Kentucky Coffee Trees took, but every single Tulip Tree we've ever planted there has done well. Obviously, it's a good spot for that species. Lately we've gotten a little more focused with the selection of species, planting large numbers of trees that are already present in surrounding forested areas, with a few exotics thrown in as experiments. For example, we have an Ohio Buckeye that puts out wonderful leaves every year, but has barely grown 10 cm. It's probably doomed, but sometimes a freshly planted tree will spin its wheels for a few years, then go roaring off into the stratosphere. Others "die" only to resprout from the base and do well thereafter. A weird business altogether.

We plant thickly, at approximately twice the density that trees would have in a mature forest. If you give nature some selecting to do, the result may be more, well, "natural." We had originally conceived of the RZ as a linking forest between the creek bluffs and the Blind Creek Forest. That's what it's turning out to be. We hope to plant the remaining trees (all in pots) during our next two-day stay.

As we planted the Amelanchier, a handsome, metallic ground beetle wandered into the disk. (P) We also took the wasp blaster to every little caterpillar tent we could find in the area.(P)

Here, in text-graphic form, is the cross-section of a planting hole:



[the graphic may not survive the email process without becoming dislocated]

*It is interesting to note that the Hickory species closest to the Bitternut genetically is the Pecan, apparently -- a more southern tree. The fleshy part of the nut is almost identical in appearance and the bitter "dust" on a freshly opened pecan tastes like the Bitternut flesh itself.

birds: (14) not a good birding day - plus we were busy planting

American Crow (EW); American Robin (GF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (FCF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF); Canada Goose (LM); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Great Blue Heron (FCF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Song Sparrow (LM); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

Note: Many of the problems with trees "taking" in an open-area planting is that many species are not particularly light-tolerant. Maples are in this category, but seem to harden off if they survuve long enough, doing well thereafter.