

## What Made those Screaming Noises?

Newport Forest Sunday May 16 2010 2:55 - 6:15 pm

weather: prec. 41 mm; RH 54 %; BP 102.3; hz/sn; calm; T 24° C  
purpose: trail maintenance  
participants: Kee, Steve, Will Rick

Although I usually work along with the crews I bring in, I had other things to do on the property today, so I got them all mulching trail with the wood chips that Darren brought in recently, then went off on my own: first to the Hogsback to check the large Flowering Dogwood at the River Bluffs, then down through the Riverside Forest to the Sandbar, to check on the Hazel, Pawpaws, etc.

The first thing I noticed coming in with Will today was that many species of younger trees had been hit by last week's killer frost. The species most affected in the Regen Zone were: Tulip Tree (all of them); Red Oak; Honey Locust; Shagbark Hickory, and Sassafras. Although some of these species may be more prone to frost damage than others, I would guess it also had something to do with the stage that leaf development was at when temperatures plunged. (e.g. Black Walnut wasn't affected because leafing out has barely begun.)

There were lots of butterflies about, mostly in the following species: Mourning Cloak, Red Admiral, Cabbage White, Eastern Comma, and Meadow Fritillary. Some of these species were already engaged in mating flight behaviour.

When Steve and Rick came in, I set them up for the afternoon and proceeded on my mission to the Flowering Dogwood. Will spotted a half-grown American Toad by the trailer before I left and then, along the Blind Creek Trail, I spotted an Eastern Garter Snake (dark race) spiriting itself under a log. Along the trail I noted with dismay that the Garlic Mustard has begun a new wave of invasive colonization of the Blind Creek Forest. As I walked, my mind wandered, as usual: "The things that upset me the most have the initials 'GM:' Garlic Mustard, genetic modification, and the Gulf of Mexico."

Strangely, there was almost no Garlic Mustard on the Hogsback, by way of contrast. Too dry? I followed a succession of deer trails along the ridge of the Hogsback, coming out into a kind of "alpine meadow," an area that has been open since we first came to the property more than ten years ago, with few signs of closing in. It's great Ruffed Grouse country, but we haven't seen one of those birds going on four years! The "meadow" is about 100 m long and 20 m wide. Back in the wooded area, numerous bushes of Prickly Ash tried to tear off my clothes, but I motored grimly on until I came to the end of the Hogsback -- which forms the River Bluffs. There was the Flowering Dogwood, just past its peak bloom, but still very pretty. (See IMAGES, below.)

I doubled back on my trail until I came even with the Riverside Forest, then descended the less hazardous slope there, picked up the Riverside Trail and following it to the Sandbar spur line. (I think of the trails as railroads, for some reason.) The Stinging Nettles are nearly one metre high and growing fast, It took me a while to locate and check on the American Hazel (doing poorly) and the Pawpaw (just about to leaf). I was serenaded by a Northern Oriole overhead as I made my way back to the main trail and on to the camp. At the Vernal Ponds (A & B) I came even with Mrs Grosbeak, just back from Peru. She perched on a bush a bare two metres from my head. "How was your trip?" "Fine," she said, "but the inflight movie was terrible."

Their work for the day over, the crew and I took a break at the Nook. We were in the middle of a pleasant conversation, when we heard a roaring sound (actually, a half roar, half scream) coming from Eva's Woods, about 200 m away. We all looked at each other, wide-eyed, jaws agape. What the heck was that? It was a big animal to have that kind of volume and frequency, but what was it? We talked about cougars and the bear that was recently shot within the London city limits. The roar came twice more. Will remarked after a few minutes: "Notice the birds have all stopped singing?" he was right. Silence. I had always taken Steve as my unflappable native mentor, but now he glanced apprehensively at the woods. "Well, he said. I think it's time to be going . . ."

birds: (18)

American Crow (RSF); American Robin (FCF); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (FC/TR); Common Yellowthroat (BCF); Eastern Towhee (HB); great Blue Heron (FC); Great Crested Flycatcher (GF); Mourning Dove (Tr); Northern Cardinal (EW); Northern Oriole (SB); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (HB); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (Rd/UM); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (EW)

phenology:

Hop Trees and Black Walnuts breaking bud; first mosquitoes (two seen)

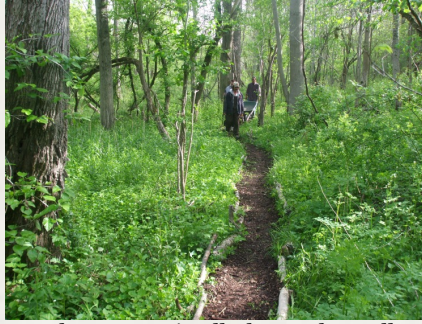
## IMAGES:

*(click on image to enlarge)*



*Flowering Dogwood: this tree grows on the steep downslope of the River Bluffs, being about 7 m high, its top even with the crest of the Hogsback, where I stood for this shot. We are grateful to Jane Bowles for first spotting this tree about 4 years ago.*

*(click on image to enlarge)*



*What access is all about: the well-groomed trail should feel like a velvet carpet. Here, Rick, Will and Steve return for another load of mulch. (Next time, we'll bring another wheel barrow.)*

*(click on image to enlarge)*



*The Amber Snail, a species of Succinea, is one of the few native snails we still see regularly.*