

Trailer Maintenance Reveals 12,000 Lady Beetles

Newport Forest Thursday June 3 2010 1:50 - 6:30 pm

weather: prec. 7 mm; RH 75%; BP 101.1 kPa; calm; ovcast; T 23° C

purpose: trailer maintenance

participants: Kee, Brian

In exchange for his usual payment (a fresh-baked apple pie), Edgar agreed to mow the farm track from the gate down to the Lower Meadow. As Edgar's tractor chugged along, bush-hog in tow, Brian set to work on the trailer windows and missing paneling. Meanwhile, I went to investigate a new bird call emanating from a dead elm on the other side of the meadow. The bird was strongly silhouetted, with visible parts somewhat masked, but I caught the profile of a large flycatcher. Checking one of our many bird books, I decided it was the right size for an Olive-sided Flycatcher, which would be a new species for us. However, it was not singing the "Quick-three-beers" song. Could it have been a Great Crested Flycatcher singing something besides its usual "weeeb" call?

During this visit we had two five minute periods of light rain falling at the rate of one drop every ten seconds -- not stellar. The gauge showed a mere 7 mm in any case, well below what the rest of our area received recently. (Yes, the gauge was leak-rested.)

I wandered the Lower Meadow and Creek Bluffs for new plants, rounding up some 7 new specimens for Pat to examine*, mostly diminutive plants with tiny flowers or fruit. I then went to the lower rapids on the creek to pick up a sample of "mossy" stones, often a good source for everything from flatworms to algae. Arriving at the rapids, I startled a Great Blue Heron that had been fishing there. It startled me as much, exploding into flight and beating its way up and along the open corridor above the creek, wing-tips nearly touching overhanging trees.

By 5:30 pm the sun had begun to break through the overcast and I went to see how Brian was coming with the trailer. I didn't bother trying to count the dead ladybeetles that littered the floor of the trailer. There must have been thousands -- all falling out of the trailer walls when Brian removed some of the rotted paneling.

The trees in the Regen Zone are all doing very well, in spite of the reduced precipitation. Even the little tree we call "Jane's Sassafras" has resprouted near the top, the hard frost having destroyed the terminal bud. (See image below)

* none of these were new. We may be nearing the end of the "collector's curve," where new species become harder and harder to find, a signal that the end is nigh, so to speak. In short, we might have something like 50 species to go, with the next 25 taking several more years and the remainder nearly forever (at the current rate of sampling effort).

birds (11):

American Crow (BCF); Blue Jay (LM); Common Yellowthroat (LM/HBF); Great Blue Heron (FC); Northern Cardinal (GF); Northern Oriole (TR); Red-bellied Woodpecker (FCF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Song Sparrow (HBF); Spotted Sandpiper (TR); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF)

leps:

Meadow Fritillary; Little Wood Satyr; Red Admiral

new species:

'Oval Amphora' Amphora ovalis FC KD Je03/10
'Common Cosmarium' Cosmarium botrytis FC KD Je03/10
'Linear Closterium' Closterium moniliferum FC KD Je03/10
'Non-linear Closterium' Closterium [parvulum] FC KD Je03/10

Note 1: I was surprised to find a few species that normally occur in lentic (e.g. pond) waters, rather than the fast-moving current in the Fleming Creek rapids. These included Lacrymaria, a long-necked ciliate that is common in the vernal ponds, and Melosira, a filamentous diatom.

Note 2. Amphora is a genus of diatom. Closterium and Cosmarium are two genera of desmids, algae that consist of two cells growing in the same capsule, with no cell wall between them.

phenology:

first Little Wood Satyr

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



Jane's Sassafras: Note that deer nips have eliminated lateral buds, while frostbite has eliminated the terminal bud. But the plant had stored enough energy to put out this impressive display of early leaves.

(click on image to enlarge)



Freshly mowed farm track makes access easier. The "Tin Tent" (aka house trailer) is on the left.

(click on image to enlarge)



Closterium moniliforme: Like most simple algae, the species is cosmopolitan, this particular specimen having been collected in a Japanese pond. courtesy: Protist Information Server