

A Rainy Night at Newport Forest

Newport Forest Saturday/Sunday June 5/6 2010 3:10/4:15 pm

weather: prec. 36 mm*; RH 50%; BP 100.5 kPa; calm; cld/sn; T 32° C

purpose: two-day stay

participants: Kee

*33 mm of this fell overnight saturday

On my arrival on site it confounded me how the rain gauge could have only 3 mm of water in it when virtually everywhere else had been deluged with rain the evening before. However, the weather cooperated more fully on saturday, with another 33 mm falling during my overnight stay in the trailer. At one point during the night, some hail fell on the trailer roof and I began to fear a tornado. (It is well-known that a tornado will always head for the nearest trailer!) Actually, there were reports of tornado damage in Detroit and in Leamington Ontario, south of here.

After setting up camp, I indulged in a little plant familiarization exercise by trying to ID what appeared to be a Pasture Rose, with its large, showy flowers, but quickly hit a snag on the matter of thorns, some straight, others curved. (Will consult with Jane.) Returning to the trailer, I felt eyes on my back, as the saying goes. I turned around to see a Jack Rabbit (European Hare) watching me from the track about 50 m away. Later, while sitting in the Nook, the same animal, presumably, came hopping through the Nook, completely oblivious to me and hopping right over my feet! I felt like a disembodied presence.

Inspecting the Regen Zone, the trees all seemed to be fine except our prize Black Cherry which has become a bit chlorotic, with the same leaf-spot developing that carried off its mate last year. What to do? I watered this tree and a few of the young Butternuts that were also looking pale.

About 8:10 pm, I was sitting in the Nook and a new raccoon showed up. It was a male with a straw-coloured tail, usually a sign of malnutrition. It had a good feed of kibble before giving way to the Daughter of Two-stripe (now called Wanda) and her sister. Wanda appeared to have just one kit with her. By about 9:15, the meadow came alive with fireflies, winking secret codes at each other.

I went up the track to close the gate, hearing the same, mysterious, rasping call that nearly drove Pat and me crazy one night last summer trying to figure out what animal was making it. The call was a bit like the complaint of a Gray Squirrel, but hoarser and deeper. As I proceeded up the track, the calls (about a minute or two apart) seemed to be getting louder. I stopped by the old Bitternut snag near the hydro lines and shone my flashlight on it. There it was! Perched on a branch next to the trunk was an owl that, as soon as illuminated, took flight like a grey ghost down into the Gallery Forest. The earless, bullet-shaped head, along with the call (later verified on the web), betrayed its identity. Returning from the gate, I felt the first spatters of a coming rain. A Cottontail Rabbit ran ahead of the flashlight briefly, before diving into the meadow vegetation.

Later, another male raccoon showed up to eat kibble on the track in front of the trailer -- probably Waldo, Wanda's brother -- and later the straw-tailed male showed up in the same area to finish the leavings.

It never stopped raining until about 3:30 am, leaving a more generous reading in the rain gauge this time. I slept fitfully until about 5:30 am. I made some pancakes, then slept until 10 am, when Steve and Darren showed up with a High school teacher from Ridgetown by the name of Elliot. Later, Ken and Nancy Murray, two TTLT members, dropped by for a visit. By noon the overcast cleared out to make room for a new high; the winds, previously from the NE, swung around to the NW. I felt I should walk the Thames River Trail, but didn't feel I had the energy.

birds: (19)

American Crow (UM); American Robin (FCF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Common Grackle (GF); Common Yellowthroat (LM/BCF); Downy Woodpecker (LM); Eastern Screech Owl (EW); Eastern Towhee (GF); Gray Catbird (GF); Great Crested Flycatcher (FCF); Mourning Dove (LM); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Northern Flicker (GF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Short-eared Owl (GF); Song Sparrow (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (LM)

(about 10 less than we would expect for this time of year)

new species:

“Rock Horn’ Rhoicosphenia curvata FC KD Je03/10

Note: This is a common diatom in creek and river rapids. Like the diatom Cocconeis, it is capable of adhering to filamentous algae to prevent being swept away by the current.

IMAGES

(click on image to enlarge)



Various birds have taken lately to perching atop the meter-post to have their pictures taken. Now it's the turn of a female (?) Gray Catbird.

(click on image to enlarge)



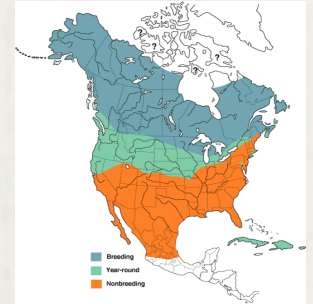
The Short-eared Owl: in it's ground nest.

(click on image to enlarge)



The Short-eared Owl: on a hunting perch

(click on image to enlarge)



Range map for the Short-eared Owl in North America implies that Newport Forest is in the “year-round” zone. We have seen them in late winter and (now) in late spring. Short-eared Owls are the most widely distributed Owl in the world, being found in Asia, South America, Europe, The Galapagos Islands, etc.