

No New Plants but one new Butterfly ...

Newport Forest Saturday/Sunday July 3/4 2010 2:30/5:05 pm

weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 50%; BP 102.2 kPa; clr; SW 0-15 kmh; T 33° C
purpose: two-day stay plus NABA Annual Butterfly Count
participants: Pat, Kee

Every year at this time, the North American Butterfly Association holds its annual Butterfly Count, with literally thousands of stations reporting in from across the continent. The contingent assigned to Newport Forest by local Count Director Ann White included Maris Apse, John Anderton, Micki Angel, and Laura Hathaway. (That was on Sunday.)

Arriving at the property on Saturday, we looked in vain for Bobolinks. It occurred to Pat that we had seen them only during their site selection process and they had since moved on to another area. After setting up camp, we drove back out to the West Ravine at the edge of the property and walked along the steep bank of the ravine inside the forest edge, returning via the West Meadow. We both came back to the road with a handful of plants that we could not immediately identify. On this occasion, as on so many others, we found plants that had already been discovered by Jane Bowles on the site. It was disappointing when the unusually short Enchanter's Nightshade turned out NOT to be Dwarf Enchanter's Nightshade, which would be new.

Nevertheless, the West Ravine is interesting -- if you can avoid the 7-metre tumble to the bottom. Lots of Shagbark Hickories line the steep banks, along with Chinkapin Oak, Bur Oak, and White Ash. Out in the meadow we found the usual pre-breakout population of honeybees. (Breakout happens when the asters and goldenrod come into flower.)

Back at camp, we walked down to the creek at the lower rapids, where I spotted an odd-looking mustard, with multiple fronds of pods, right beside the creek. This turned out to be Yellow Rocket (another Bowles find). The usual three squirrel species showed up at the feeders: Striped Chipmunk, Eastern Gray Squirrel (black phase), and Red Squirrel. We sat at the Nook table arguing about the teeth on the leaves of our Enchanter's Nightshade specimen. One of Pat's favorite spots on the property is an old Bitternut snag that refuses to topple. This locale, surrounded by bushes and gallery trees, seems to have the highest density of bird species on the property. Here she watched a Common Flicker take a comical dust bath on the road. Here also, she watched a Gray Catbird display its vocal repertoire, imitating some three different species of bird! And here, an Eastern Cottontail rabbit hopped out on the road for a spell of crepuscular foraging.

As we dined in the Nook, we were joined by Wilma, with two advanced kits. Then a very strange, nearly all-black raccoon showed up. Only face and foreleg markings had any non-black colouring. We had never seen this individual before -- ein auslander! Meanwhile, Wilma & Co seemed to melt away into the gathering dusk. A Little Brown Bat (most likely sp.) flew up and down the farm track hunting insects.

Later Wanda showed up with four less-advanced kits. We now know that Wilma is not a "maiden Aunt," after all, but a mother in her own right. She must have had her litter a week or two before her sister. It didn't help, as we tried to sleep later on, to have the night punctuated by growls and snarls as the kits of both Wanda and Wilma fought over a few remaining bits of kibble.

Come morning, we found grackles massing in the Blind Creek Forest, flying incessantly back and forth over the Lower Meadow, parents and young both, clucking as they went. Pat drove up to visit Nina and inspect her new vegetable garden. I remained in the Nook, trying to stay awake after a nearly sleepless night.

The butterfly people arrived and Pat conducted them to the river where, she felt sure, they would find an American Snout. They did. Then Donald Craig showed up to help with our first watering operation in the Regen Zone. Good steward that he is, he brought a truck load of filled jugs and we watered from the truck, covering all but a strip adjacent to the Blind Creek Forest, which I can do myself later.

We held a watermelon-and-pop party for the butterflyers on their return from the river. Their list (See below.) was not impressive, but Maris Apse found the rare Little Yellow butterfly on site. They had started their day, along with a dozen other counters across the river in the Skunk's Misery area. We noted that the European Skipper population has crashed, with very few about, in contrast to the tens of thousands estimated to be on site in previous years.

Birds (30)

American Crow (EW); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (GF); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (BCF/LM); Cedar Waxwing (HP); Common Flicker (GF); Common Grackle (UM); Common

Yellowthroat (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Gray Catbird (FC); Great Blue Heron (FCF); Eastern Bluebird (Rd/UM); Eastern Kingbird (HP); Eastern Screech Owl (EW); Eastern Towhee (GF); House Wren (Rd); Killdeer (MB); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (LM); Song Sparrow (LM); Spotted Sandpiper (MB); Tree Swallow (UM/Rd); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (FCF); Wood Thrush (GF); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (BCF/E)

Note: non-birding readers should note that these lists are generally far from complete; the number of bird species on site could easily be double the figure reported here, for example. These are mainly the birds we see or hear, with insectivores somewhat under-reported, for one thing.

Best Birds: Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Bluebird

Leps (15):

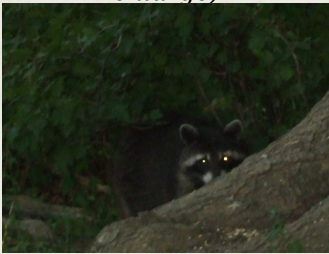
American Snout; Eastern Tiger Swallowtail; European Skipper; Cabbage White; Clouded Sulphur; Common Wood Nymph; Great Spangled Fritillary; Little Wood Satyr; Little Yellow; Meadow Fritillary; Monarch; Northern Crescent; Orange Sulphur; Red Admiral; Summer Azure

new species:

Little Yellow *Eurema lisa* RL MA J103/10

Images

(click on image to enlarge)



Swamp Coon?" Farmers, woodsmen & natives all swear to the reality of an all-black raccoon that lives in swampy areas. This one was solid black, except for light areas on face a grey swath on shoulders. Could this be the source of the rural legend?

(click on image to enlarge)



(Throughout our visit my digital camera refused to focus properly on closeups as I had it on the wrong setting.) The Little Yellow butterfly resembles other sulphurs, but dark edging is distinctive:

(click on image to enlarge)



Coyote passes trail cam at midnight on July 1st, (Drag to desktop for better view.) We must cut those plants in front of the trail!