

Romancing the Gentian

Newport Forest Friday September 17 2010 3:40 - 8:20 pm

Weather: prec. 16 mm; RH 63%; BP 102.1 kPa; ovcast; calm; T 24° C

Purpose: collecting new species

Participants: Kee

After setting up camp and recording the weather, I took the Thames River Trail to the river bluffs, where I spent nearly an hour checking the Gentian population in the bluffs area, counting some 58 individual plants within 50 m of the bench. I collected a few other species of plant for Pat to examine at home and also looked for liverworts. I saw lots of Red-legged Grasshoppers about, spotted a large Fall Ground Cricket and a Yellow-faced Bee, among other things. We have yet to find a single species of liverwort anywhere on the property. Every time I passed an area with moss today, I took extra time to look around for liverworts. I have found liverworts in other areas and know what to look for, but I grow increasingly mystified about why they seem so rare at Newport Forest.

I walked the rest of the trail, taking a side trip to the Sand Bar, where I found an American Hazel that we had planted several years ago still struggling gamely on, but having a tough time in the very tall vegetation of that locale (Giant Ragweed, Stinging Nettle, etc.) Back on the main trail, I made my way up to the Hogsback, noting as I went that many new fungi had sprouted after the recent rain. Fungi are getting to be a problem: we have found all (or most) of the relatively common ones and now must increasingly deal with specimens that do not appear in our reference books, keying into a black hole. On the Hogsback, for example, I found a medium sized ringed mushroom fruiting on buried wood and with a distinctive-looking freckled cap. Not in the references. I hate to burden Greg Thorn with these specimens, especially now that term has started at Western.

More fungi greeted me on the descent into the Blind Creek Forest. I photographed a large, frilly white trumpet-shaped mushroom growing on wood, then listened for birds: One Gray Catbird calling. Back at camp I had supper in the Nook and watched a Chipmunk at the Maple Feeder. Later I heard two Chipmunks calling from two locations a hundred yards apart in the Gallery Forest. The "pocks" went rapidly, evenly, and at slightly different frequencies. It was amusing to hear the sequences drifting into and out of phase. I did no bee protocol today, owing to the excessive overcast. I saw honeybees about, however.

At the end of today's visit, I had planned a short animal-watch. We have grown out of touch with the Two-stripe Family* line and wanted to get some idea of how the expected dispersal was going. Having baited the area with cat kibble, a general favorite, I waited near the Nook until 7:55 pm, when the first raccoon showed up, a large subadult that fled when I moved. This made me think "auslander." Two-stripers were accustomed to my presence and might regard me for a moment, but then would go back to their kibble. This individual next appeared at the Hickory feeder to glean fallen birdseed. Again it ran off when I appeared. The third sighting came at 8:10 pm, when I found it back in the Nook, but up on the tray of the Maple feeder, It did not move now because it felt safer. (It's a curious fact that some raccoons prefer birdseed to kibble, even the high-quality Purina brand.) At home the trail cam SD card revealed a recent visit by a mother and one kit to the water tub.

It was dark and the air temperature had dropped to 12° C. The planet Venus, now a brilliant evening star, descended behind the Hogsback, even as Jupiter rose in the east. I left fungi, raccoons and planets to their own devices.

*Two-stripe was a female we monitored in 2009. She went missing on or before August 15, leaving her kits to an uncertain fate. Two of her daughters (Wanda & Wilma) remained in the home territory and produced the next generation this year, although one of the families seem to have left early, possibly driven off by her sister. (This "family" thing only goes so far.)

birds: (an embarrassing 6)

American Crow (UM); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (LM); Gray Catbird (BCF); Mourning Dove (Nk); Wild Turkey (EW)

New Species:

Yellow-faced Bee *Hylaeus* sp. RBlf KD Sp17/10

Notes: 1. This is probably either *H. affinis* or *H. modestus* (can't say without the specimen) 2. Correction: Now that we have examined a specimen of the Gentian reported as growing on the bluffs, we must change the record. The

Gentian listed in this section on Sept 12 was not *Gentiana procera*, but *G. crinita*. Bowles agrees.

Drought Watch: precipitation shortfall = 24 % (dropping slow---ly)

IMAGES:



This attractive millipede has been collected /observed twice at Newport Forest. (web source) Apheloria virginiensis has no common name. We call it the 'Black-and-yellow Milliped.' Millipeds belong to the class Diplopoda, each segment sporting two pairs of legs.



Gentiana crinita on the River Bluffs



Fungus of the week: False Turkeytail (Stereum ostrea) is a distinctive and easily recognized bracket, usually but not always with greenish zones, as shown here.