

## **It Never Rains, but it Pours!**

Newport Forest Saturday-Sunday Oct9-10/10 2:45-4:45 pm

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 68%; BP 101.1 kPa; calm; clr; T 20° C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

The hot sun had brought the trailer to near incandescence and the metal siding was aswarm with assorted Lady beetles, Box-elder Bugs, and Polistine wasps -- three outbreaks in one, although paper wasps are somewhat common around the trailer throughout the warm months.

And everywhere we looked, from forest to brush to meadow, there were birds. Pat quickly realized that we were not only seeing a continuation of the warbler migration that began a few weeks ago, but the first arrivals of our northern seed-eaters, the White-throated and White-crowned Sparrow, as well as the Dark-eyed Junco. We therefore anticipated a longer-than usual bird list. ( and got one.)

Pat was the serious birder this visit. While she went birding, I went down to the river to install some erosion monitoring spikes on Mussel Beach. Each spike has a fluorescent head and was driven (pressed) deep enough to reduce the probability of snagging drift and at a location 50 cm from the present shore ledge. Some seven such spikes were installed along the shore. I then went into the Riverside Forest and drove in six graduated sediment posts (1" x 1") to monitor soil flood-deposition in four locations throughout Bluebell Woods and two locations at the Sandbar. We are therefore set up (somewhat) to monitor both loss and gain of property mass.

I was mildly disturbed during this process by some children driving an ATV through the woods across the river; laughing and screaming at the top of their lungs.

When I got back to camp, Pat reported several migrant bird species, not to mention two Eastern Gray Squirrels (black phase) at the feeders and the usual Chipmunks. To maximize our daylight outdoors, we delayed supper until sunset. Just one raccoon showed up in the baited area, a newcomer who may well have driven out the Two-stripe Dynasty. This one was extremely shy, as in our previous two encounters.

Earlier I had put out a bagful of peanuts-in-the-shell for flying squirrels on the trailer roof (where raccoons couldn't catch them easily). I had done this every overnight stay for the last two years, without seeing a single Flying Squirrel. This time was different. A gray-brown individual showed up at the Hickory feeder around 8 pm and later an all-gray individual appeared at the same tray. So obviously, they're still around. Much later, as I worked on a statistical problem in the trailer, I could hear several individuals pattering over the roof for more than an hour as they cleaned up all the peanuts.

Having coffee in the trailer around 9 pm, I read to Pat (for information & entertainment) about coyotes from the Audubon Mammal Guide. I had no sooner put the book down after reading about Coyote choruses, than one started up in Eva's Woods, a scant 200 m away! The chorus lasted no more than 5 minutes and consisted of the usual variety of insane yips and yowls. The geese down at the river, by the way, would not shut up all night. Every hour or so, something would alarm them, resulting in a sound like 100 bicycle horns.

The overnight low was 8° C and I spent a few spells outdoors practicing my stargazing. The Summer Triangle is an easily spotted triad of bright stars that spans the Milky Way (clearly visible this night). Each star lies in a different constellation: Deneb in Cygnus the Swan, Altair in the Aquila the Eagle, and Vega in the constellation Lyra. I examined the latter instrument, seeing that it had three invisible strings. (When plucked, they produce inaudible music.) Occasional meteors shot overhead during these outings.

I was startled at one point when a Meadow Jumping Mouse shot across the trail nearby, but I saw none of the hoped-for skunks out foraging where they had been recently. I worked late in the trailer, hoping to hear owls. None. Only the sound of distant diesel locomotive horns on the old Grand Trunk line some 5 km to the north. That moan of the diesel horn has slowly replaced the wail of the steam whistles, in my mind, as the sound of distance.

The morning brought no "dawn chorus," unless you count the flock of Canada Geese by the river. But birds were still everywhere. While I watched one Tufted Titmouse in the Nook, congratulating myself as I did, Pat was watching a flock of seven in the Hole. By noon the temperature had reached 29° C (= 84° F for our American readers), a potential record for this date.

Steward Bruce Parker showed up and we decided that while he and Pat went to look for the new surveyor's marks on the east lot line (preparatory to posting signs there), I would walk the Thames River Trail. I stopped to patrol Mussel

Beach and noticed some great growths of blue-green algae spangled with (oxygen!) bubbles just below the shore ledge. I couldn't resist taking a sample. In the Riverside Forest I hunted for the stakes we had used to position several mapping plots in the Riverside Forest in 2003. On that occasion our volunteer Nic Mihlik and I plotted the location, species, and diameter of every tree and sapling in each of the eight 20-metre plots. It was time to repeat the mapping to get some idea of the trajectory" of the woody species there. But try as I might I couldn't find a single stake! (Blame the floods.) But that was alright, Pat and Bruce failed to find a single surveyor's mark on the east lot line. It was time for us to leave. Bruce stayed to walk the trails.

Birds: (26)

American Crow (EW); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (RB); Blue Jay (GF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Brown Creeper (Hol); Common Flicker (GF/HBF); Common Grackle (LM); Dark-eyed Junco (LM); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Hairy Woodpecker (FCF); House Wren (Hol); Mourning Dove (LM); Northern Cardinal (Sng); Northern Harrier (LM); Pileated Woodpecker (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (UM); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Ruby-crowned Kinglet (GF/E); Song Sparrow (LM); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); White-crowned Sparrow (Nk); White-throated Sparrow (Nk); Yellow-rumped Warbler (Nk);

Notes: 1. Best bird was the Tufted Titmouse, a year-round resident that we see only a few times annually, yet today we saw seven of them! 2. The woodpeckers all showed up, too (5 spp)

New species:

'Bent-head Oscillatoria' *Oscillatoria tenuis* TR KD Oc10/10

'Dark Oscillatoria' *Oscillatoria nigra* TR KD Oc10/10

Note: These are common filamentous blue-green algae

Phenology: Population outbreaks for Box Elder Bugs and Lady Beetle (ssp.).

Note: It's been a poor summer/fall for the Orthopteran community. You have to walk some to see a single grasshopper. Crickets have not been calling (!) and we have not heard a single Katydid so far this year. We have no idea what to make of this. Is it a natural, multi-species population "trough," so to speak?

## IMAGES:



*The Upper Meadow is going through old-field succession, just as the Lower Meadow is. Perhaps the aster-dominated vegetation represents an earlier stage of the process. (Purple flowers and white ones are mostly asters, yellow ones are goldenrod.) The brilliant red Sugar Maple in the background is the same tree presented in an '09 photograph posted a few days ago.*



*Jane's Sassafras shows off its fall wardrobe. [note drip irrigation bucket]*



*Young Red Oak in Regen Zone "died" two years ago, then resprouted from the base. Note original stem, now dead. We've never seen an oak quite this red before! It looks artificial, somehow.*



*A coyote sniffs the meter post last year at this time.*