

Newport Forest

Sunday December 5 2010

2:50 - 4:35 pm

Weather: prec. 27mm; RH 74%; BP 101.7 kPa; cld/sn; NW 40 kmh, T -2° C

Purpose: snow tracking

Participants: Kee

Although the purpose of today's visit was to do some tracking in the snow, it turned out there was no snow to track in! Whiteout conditions in London had disappeared by the time I got to Delaware and by Melbourne, the roads were completely bare. The property, not surprisingly, was 99% snow-free, with only a thin dusting here and there.

I visited the creek to liberate the little guys in my sample bottles and noted that the Lower Rapids had disappeared under higher water. Walking to the river, I found that it was over the banks, totally immersing Mussel Beach, and lapping at the foot of the bluffs. The wind was harsh out of the NW and I hadn't sufficient gumption to walk the Thames Rive Trail under those conditions.

Melting the ice and snow in the snowpail, I found a dead Deer Mouse frozen into the ice. This is a periodic event whenever one leaves a container of water anywhere with the top off. Mice are good climbers and clamber up the sides of the container. Then they go to drink, fall in, and cannot get out. A nasty death!

There being nothing else of note to report, I will catch up on some backlog material below, particularly some pictures taken with an analog camera during our first years on the property. Recently, I had some of them scanned into jpgs.

New Species:

Suctorian	<i>Podophrya fixa</i>	LR/FC KD Oc24/10
'Mini-phacus'	<i>Phacus [caudatus]</i>	LR/FC KD Oc24/10
'Small-headed Navicula'	<i>Navicula cryptocephala</i>	LR/FC KD Oc24/10
'Humpbacked Rotifer'	<i>Colurella Sp.</i>	LR/FC KD Oc24/10

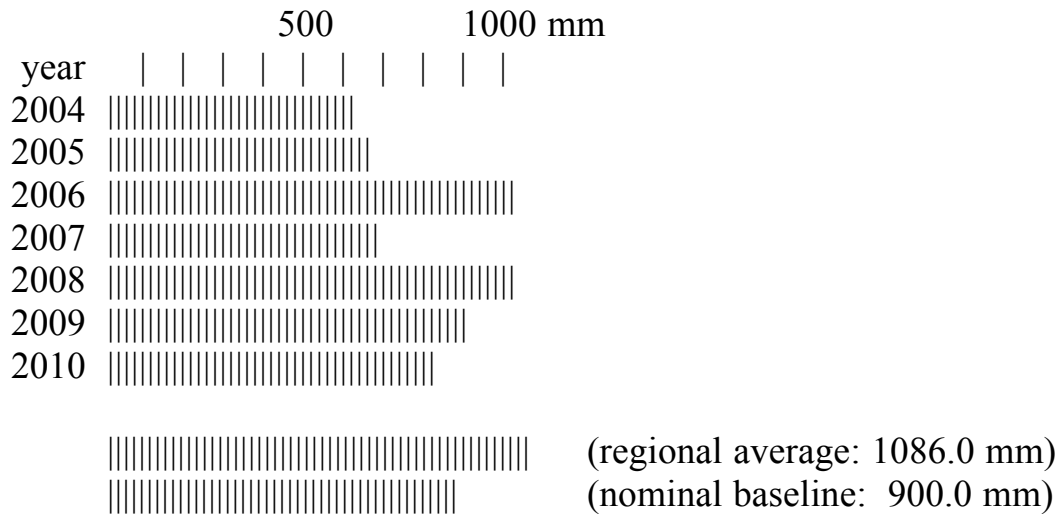
Note: The sample from the rapids was providing diminishing returns (aka "the collector's curve") and I felt like dumping it. Then I noticed that the ATBI count was just short of 1700 spp. I needed (and got) one more. Then I dumped it.

Phenology & Populations:

The previous warm seasons saw a remarkable decline in Orthopteran populations - as witnessed in field & forest. I saw perhaps five grasshoppers all summer and, during the night, the usual cacophony of crickets was replaced by a mere one or two calling. Another population that has almost certainly gone into decline is that of the Red-bellied Woodpecker. We saw one perhaps five or six times during the last year, when normally we would see them on almost every visit, a good 40 + times.

Drought years:

The total precipitation received by the property over 2010 can now be reasonably estimated at 815 mm. The crude bar chart below gives one some idea of the shortfall over recent years. The regional average bar is longer than *all* of the bars!



In words, only two of the last seven years have escaped being drought years. If this trend continues, one may expect to see some radical population shifts at Newport Forest. Oaks & Hickories will increase, at a guess, while Beeches and Maples decline. Herpetofauna will decline (further), along with insects, generally.

IMAGES:

Podophrya fixa is a protist belonging to the subclass Suctoria of Ciliophora. In plainer english this means that Suctorians are actually ciliates (like Paramecium and Oxytricha) but have no cilia when fully developed.



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica Online

Instead, they have “tentacles,” as shown here. Each tentacle has a “sucker” which latches onto a passing protist, lyses a perforation in the cell wall of the victim, then sucks out the cytoplasm like a kid with a soda straw. A stalk anchors the Suctorian in place. (This one’s a “lifer” for me.)

‘Blue’ Garter Snake: The Eastern Garter Snake has many colour variations, usually involving the darker colors (checks) you see here. The ground colour is normally yellow-to-orangy-brown. I couldn’t find any references to Garter snakes having a bluish-grey ground colour, as here. (We have found more than one, too.)



photo c 2003

Baby fawn has been hidden by its mother while she goes shopping. [Beatrix Potter School of Ecology] The fawn instinctively freezes in this position and even takes very shallow breaths to avoid detection.



photo c 2003

Nic (a volunteer in the early 2000s) came to me one day while we worked on the Fleming Creek trail (now abandoned). “There’s a dead little deer back there.” It sure looked dead -- until I spotted the slow movement of breathing. We left it in peace.