

Newport Forest

Saturday April 2 2011

2:00- 6:45 pm

Weather: prec. 1 mm; RH 52%; BP 100.5 kPa; ovcast; NNE 5 kmh; T 10° C

Purpose: Workday and vernal pond walk

Participants: Jane Bowles and Crew of 12 + Kee

Counting heads in the Upper Meadow when I arrived (late) on site, I was gratified to find some 11 volunteers out cutting thorn trees. Jane Bowles had done an awesome job of putting this effort together. By 3:30 all but a few smallish thorn trees had been removed from the meadow. Larger domestic apple tree saplings (relict generations? hybrids?) were left as perching trees.

After most of the crew had left, Bruce and Joel accompanied me down to the trailer, along with Erin Carroll and her friend Kate. After a brief round of doughnuts, Bruce & Joel had to go, so Erin, Kate & I decided to hunt for salamanders in the Blind Creek Forest. According to Erin, it was the right time of year to look under logs near vernal ponds. (Both Erin and Kate are biology grads and now work in the environmental area.)

We set out for the Blind Creek Forest, uncertain of what we might find. Erin would point out a log and we would overturn it, finding little or nothing. Under one or two logs, however, we found several earthworms, a favorite food of larger salamanders. Further along the Blind Creek trail, Erin spotted a log she thought was just the right size and in just the right location in relation to the nearby vernal pond. When she rolled the log, voila! I was almost shocked at the size of the creature, not to mention its nearly all-black coloration. We took multiple pictures from various angles and distances, inserting a twonie at one point to get some scale. The salamander moved very little while we examined it (without picking it up). It had a burrow entrance nearby. We replaced the log without crushing the specimen.

Erin also found quite a few land snail shells scattered about the flood-soaked leaf litter, including not only that invasive critter, the European Striped Snail, but several native species, including the Whitelipped Globe Snail, the Northern Three-tooth, and the Forest Snail. Erin also kindly took a pond surface sample for me, as she had boots and I didn't.

We turned over a few more logs without result, then decided to climb the Hogsback to look for patches of Harbinger of Spring, one of the earliest ephemerals to emerge each year. We didn't locate the patches, but Erin spotted

two Eastern Garter Snakes, recently out of hibernation.

After Erin & Kate left, I noticed a Chipmunk scurrying about the big log in the Nook. (another sign of spring) Then the clouds that had threatened rain all afternoon finally opened up for about ten minutes, leaving behind about a mm of new precipitation. I then closed camp, walked up to the van, and departed.

Birds: (12)

American Robin (BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (BCF); Common Flicker (LM); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Song Sparrow (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wild Turkey (HL)

New species: (#1701)

Blue-spotted Salamander *Ambystoma laterale* VP/HB ec/KD Ap01/11

*This is probably a Jefferson Salamander (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*) cross. The background colour is a solid black, as in the Blue-spotted, but the pattern of bluish dots along the lower sides of the creature is not at all a character of the Blue-spotted, but of the Jefferson, instead. Southern Ontario is in the “hybrid zone” for the two species, once considered to be the same.

Phenology:

First chipmunks and garter snakes out & about, mound ants not yet active

IMAGES:



Approximately half the work crew can be seen in this photo, busily cutting out thorn trees to prepare Bobolink/Meadowlark habitat. This view to southwest (where most of our weather originates) shows gathering overcast.



Jane Bowles threatens to cut off nose of young crew member Joel Parker, while eco-chemist Ron Martin looks on in horror.



An apparent Blue-spotted/Jefferson Salamander cross. This appears to be an older individual with a total length of approximately 10 cm. Other images show very small blue spots along lower sides of body. Light areas here are all reflections. Non-hybrid Blue-spotted Salamanders have large blue blotches over entire body surface.



Two Eastern Garter Snakes, recently emerged from hibernation, were still somewhat torpid, in spite of the warming temperatures.