

Newport Forest

Thursday April 7 2011

2:35 - 6:45 pm

**Weather:** prec. 37 mm; RH 100%; BP 102.1 kPa; sn/cld; calm; T 15° C

**Purpose:** to update spring phenology

**Participants:** Kee, Jonathan

The heavy recent rainfall of 37 mm had left the property so wet and spongy that once again I was forced to park on the high ground of the Upper Meadow. We walked on down to the trailer (“park headquarters”) to be greeted by a rather large Eastern Cottontail that hightailed out from under the trailer and through the Regen Zone at top speed.

After putting out birdseed at all three feeder locations, we sat down for a bit of serious birding. There were clearly more birds about than any previous time this year. New arrivals included the Brown-headed Cowbird, the Great Crested Flycatcher, and the Red-winged Blackbird, not to mention the “best bird” on today’s list, a bird we saw near the river later on.

Before we set out for the Thames River Trail, I wandered into the Nook where I noticed what I thought was a large fly buzzing about. But when it settled on the trunk of the old Black Maple in the Nook, I realized immediately that it was a beetle -- and a new one, at that! We photographed it from all angles but even Jonathan, who is an expert photographer, could not persuade my little Easypix camera to take an in-focus close-up of the critter at a macro distance. However, it was clearly a carrion beetle, but not any of our usual species. The images were still good enough to identify it as one of the three species of *Oiceoptoma* in our area.

Of the squirrels of Newport Forest, only the Red Squirrel and the Eastern Chipmunk showed up for a feed of seed.

We walked the Thames River Trail, going clockwise this time out of curiosity about the progress of the spring chorus in the vernal ponds, a good dozen presently in operation. Being careful not to over count we heard some 11 Western Chorus Frogs calling throughout the swamp area, along with at least five Wood Frogs.

We climbed the Hogsback and descended into the Riverside Forest. In the Beech-maple component, we found a young Sugar Maple (15 cm dbh) windthrown to the west. In the riverine component, we found two Box Elders down as well

We took a side trail to the “Sandbar”, an area of heavy sand deposition during episodes of heavy flooding. However, the river was high once again following the recent rains and our progress was blocked by the inundation of a low-lying area between the trail and the bar. Slick river mud covered the ground everywhere. To allay this disappointment fresh raccoon tracks decorated the mud everywhere, possibly the individual I saw a week ago up on the Hogsback. It’s good to know that at least one raccoon made it through what has been a somewhat brutal winter.

Back on the main trail, we were nearing the end of the Bluebell Woods, when we heard what sounded like a Robin that had forgotten to bring its sheet music. Then the gestalt kicked in: Oriole? Indeed. Binoculars revealed the bird high in a sycamore near the river, singing its heart out. Further on, we rested on the river bluffs bench to watch the mud roll by. A Stink bug landed on a stem by Jonathan’s leg and he persuaded it to venture onto the back of his hand. Once again the camera failed us.

Back in camp, we were thrilled when two Wood Ducks (breeding pair?) flew up Fleming Creek to settle into the water just below the trailer. They had barely made it to the far bank when a pair of Canada Geese flew in by the same route, splashing down, working their bicycle horns. (What is this, a marriage bureau?)

Again, I was glad we left the van in the Upper Meadow. We had some dicey moments just getting out of there!

**Corrections:** In the last issue of this bulletin I failed to give the full name of Erin Carroll’s companion, Kate Clarke. I also forgot to mention the number of Western Chorus Frogs calling -- at least five.

**Birds:** (17)

American Crow (GF); American Robin (BCF); Black-Capped Chickadee (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF/ET); Canada Goose (FC); Common Flicker (RSF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Great Crested Flycatcher (GF/E); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Northern Oriole (RSF/TR); Red-bellied Woodpecker (RSF); Red-tailed Hawk (HB); Red-winged Blackbird (ER); Song Sparrow (Nk); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wood Duck (FC)

## **New Species:**

‘Swollen Ulothrix’      *Ulothrix subconstricta*      VP/HB KD Ap02/11

Ridged Carrion Beetle\*      *Oiceoptoma inaequale*      Nk KD Ap07/11

\*Steve Marshall writes in his book INSECTS that this species “spends winter as an adult and is active in early spring, capitalizing ... on the recently thawed bodies of animals that died during the winter.”

## **Phenology:**

Bee flies and mound ants not yet active. River and creek in minor flood.

## **Climate Note:**

By mid-February last I had the notion that we were in for a cool, wet spring. The notion was brought on by the pattern of precipitation to that point, as well as the knowledge that we were in a La Nina year. At this point we have the year’s figure for first-quarter precipitation, an accurate predictor of expected precipitation about 7 times out of ten. I obsess on precipitation because of the regeneration project, both in the Regen zone and in the wild planting areas within forests. Water is everything.

So I am also predicting a better-than-average year for precipitation, as well.

## **IMAGES:**



Source: BugGuide.net [fair use]

The carrion beetle *Oiceoptoma inaequale* sometimes has a dirty dorsum, giving it a mottled appearance. However the ground colour is usually a solid black, varying in some specimens to a dark green or dark blue. With a certain sense of embarrassment, I include our best “close-up” below.

Note that what at first appears to be two orange bands along the side of the specimen above is actually a “mite load” of some six mites. These ride as passengers on many spp of carrion beetle. When they arrive at a corpse, they all pile out of their “bus” and proceed to feed and lay eggs of their own.



Our Ridged Carrion Beetle, among the roots of the Black Maple, is headed up the tree. Did something die up there? Note spilled seeds from tray feeder overhead.

Below:

Shot of downed Box Elder was taken two months ago. This species tends to develop a leaning habit as it matures. This one had been leaning at a rather precarious 45° angle to the SW in recent years. An east wind appears to have brought it down. Note shoot-branches along trunk that had previously been vertical are now themselves at a 45° angle.



