

Newport Forest

Tuesday April 12 2011

2:50 - 6:15 pm

Weather: Prec. 0 mm; RH 50%; BP 101.6 kPa;

Purpose: Monitoring the onset of spring

Participants: Kee, Jonathan

We found a fresh breeze from the north blowing on site when we arrived. Gusting to 25 kmh, the wind may have something to do with our low bird count for the day. We parked in the Upper meadow, then walked down to the trailer, where we ran into Bruce Parker, one of our more committed Stewards. Bruce had just walked the Thames River Trail, reporting that the Trout Lilies were now emerging from their winter slumber. We are also grateful to Bruce for lining about 30 m of trail along the 1300 stretch. (in the Blind Creek Forest)

Coming in I had noticed that one of the dead White Elms that had stood along the border between the Blind Creek Forest and the Lower Meadow was down. I went over to check. On the way, I noticed that we have a kind of “Dead zone” in the Regeneration area. Within a roughly circular area about 20-30 m across I couldn’t find a single one of the dozen or so planted trees there that hadn’t died! It wouldn’t be like the Newports to dump toxic waste on their property. Could it be just an enormous coincidence?

While sidetracked into an assessment of the dead zone, I noticed one of last year’s rose galls, a “pin gall” caused by the Rose Gall Wasp *Cynipis rosae*. (not new) Jonathan spent some time observing the mound ants, now out foraging with their “slaves”. The “masters” are the Alleghany Mound Ant, while the slaves are another species of Formica. According to Gary Umphrey, formerly an entomologist at Western, southern Ontario is something like a world center for ant slavery, as one might call it. Some of our mounds (including this one) have quite impressive dimensions, being over a metre across and half a metre high. Such a colony could have up to a thousand queens, according to my sources.

Jonathan, who had just finished photographing the mound and its inhabitants, joined me for a walk around the Thames River Trail. In the Blind Creek Forest, we counted some eight chorus frogs calling, joined at the west end by at least two Spring Peepers.

Up on the Hogsback, we took a break on the bench, entertained by an Anglerwing chasing a Mourning Cloak. A little later, a woodpecker came to tap lightly at a small Sugar Maple close to the bench. I got excited for a minute or two, thinking

it might be a new species of woodpecker for us but then, in a more disciplined moment, I realized that it wasn't one of our missing species, but one that was already logged. It has apparently been a while since I saw my last Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. (ahem)

After the YBS flew off, Jonathan found a large specimen of the American Carrion Beetle, *Silpha americana*, with that cryptic black boss on its yellow pronotum. He got some very nice closeups. We descended down through the Beech-maple component of the wood to examine the two ephemeral ponds that form each year at this time within broad slump valleys that marked earlier shifts in the sloping landscape. Nothing surprising in them, we turned to look at a nearby dead Bitternut, still standing. At its base was a large, dark red, shiny bracket fungus. Having learned to have second thoughts about things that look "new", I thought it might be a *Ganoderma applanatum* (Artist's Conk) discoloured by its diet or perhaps by a minute pathogenic cousin. We took several photos each of this impressive subject. Later, after examining a specimen at home, I soon realized that we had found a Lacquered Polypore, also known as the Ling-zhi in Asia.

Continuing our downslope adventure, we arrived at the river's edge right next to a tree that I occasionally show to "tree people". A giant Blue Ash overlooks the river here, accompanied by a dozen children around its base. I keep an informal list of property trees that belong to the "One-metre Club", being a metre or more in diameter at breast height. Less than 50 metres upstream we came upon another member of the club, a giant Silver Maple, now breaking heavily into bud.

Beyond the Silver Maple, we encountered the Sand Bar, an area of heavy sand accumulation that we have mentioned many times in these bulletins. I noted that the recent flood had left ripple marks across the sand. Now dry, it showed tracks of raccoons and deer, as well as minute furrows made -- at a guess --by fingernail clams. Continuing upriver, we found the sand slowly grading into a fine sand/silt combination, making perfect habitat for Virginia Bluebells, a Newport Forest specialty. Along this stretch the landscape was dotted everywhere with emergent bluebell plants, already a dozen centimetres high.

We returned to camp without encountering further distractions. I tried to find more bird species, but the windy weather seemed to be inhibiting them. The chipmunks ran a constant shuttle service between the tray feeders and their underground granaries.

Trail Cam Log:

one possum, three raccoons (possibly same individual), one deer (buck), one mystery animal that resembles a dark raccoon with a Muskrat's tail (!)

Birds: (10) [wind inhibited birds?]

American Crow (BCF); American Robin (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Common Flicker (HB); Great Blue Heron (EW); Northern Cardinal (TR); Red-bellied Woodpecker (HB); Turkey Vulture (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (HB)

New Species:

Slug Amoeba	<i>Vahlkampfia</i> sp.	VP/HB KD Ap07/11
Lacquered Polypore	<i>Ganoderma lucidum</i>	RSF/W JD/KD Ap12/11

Phenology:

Trout Lilies emerging: leaves \approx 5 cm; mound ants active; frog chorus continuing; first Mourning Cloaks and Anglewings; grasses and sedges emerging.

IMAGES:



Lacquered Polypore: this rather old specimen lacks the light-colored outer zone on the cap and its “lacquer” is somewhat faded. On dead Bitternut. [cap approx. 17 cm wide]

This fungus is also known as the Ling-zhi (Ling Chi) or Mushroom of Life in traditional Chinese medicine.



Jonathan walks Sandbar looking for tracks. The bar extends another 50 m upriver from image area. The Box Elder and other trees here may have “collected” the sand by slowing the current of massive flood water just enough to allow the sand (but not the silt) to settle out of flow.

In less than three months, the entire area will be covered by a riot of vegetation up to eye level!



Virginia Bluebells emerging for the big show in May.



Photo courtesy Jonathan Dewdney

Two worker ants from the *Formica exsectoides* species group (Alleghany Mound Ant) head out to forage.