

Newport Forest

Saturday April 23 2011

2:00 - 6:35 pm

Weather: prec.43 mm; RH 68%; BP 100.8 kPa; hz/sn; W 0-25 kmh; T 23° C

Purpose: tree planting

Participants: Kee, Steve, Carmen

Coming in at the gate, I was surprised when Lyle Mann, an older farmer down the road, stopped by in his car. He wondered when the Newport Forest Bluebell Walk would be held this year, as members of the West Elgin Nature Club wanted to join it. Then Edgar came wandering out of the Hurdle house across the road and the conversation drifted from Bluebells to curling, then on to golf. Retired farmers often follow these two sports so as to stay active year round. The golf links are now open across southern Ontario.

Steve and his friend were late getting to the site, so I parked in the Upper Meadow and carried our supplies down to the Lower Meadow and the Regen Zone. The ground is wetter and spongier than ever. Local farmers are getting worried about a late planting. Their fields are too wet for heavy equipment.

When Steve arrived with his friend Carmen, we planted five Swamp White Oak on the Blind Creek side of the Regen Zone, where large pools of water had accumulated in all the depressions from the last rain. (the same system that spawned some 200 tornados from Arkansas to North Carolina a few days ago) We also planted five Shagbark Hickories on the SW side of the Regen Zone, along with three Bitternuts and five White Oaks. In doing this we began to build up the linkage between the Regen Zone (proper) and a mixed patch of Basswood volunteers and planted Pin Oaks by the Old Snag.

In the middle of our planting work, Steve found the caterpillar of a Virginia Ctenuchid Moth. I took it over to the trailer to photograph it. While at the trailer I noticed a Red Squirrel helping itself to birdseed at the Hickory tray feeder.

As the afternoon wore on, the sky brightened and the wind, previously a breeze, strengthened into strong gusts up to 60 km/h from the SW. This cut down on the number of birds around. But previous to this Steve spotted Two Bald Eagles circling each other high in the sky overhead. Two Turkey Vultures had been busy at the same antics and earlier we saw a pair of **Cardinals*** chasing each other coyly through the Gallery Forest. It's that time of year again.

Done with planting for the afternoon, we took a little break in the Nook, where

Steve calmly pointed out something under the Hickory feeder tree, about 20 m away. “You got a visitor!” It was a Raccoon, possibly a yearling, but in good shape, unlike April Raccoons in previous years. We discussed various ways that native people have cooked Raccoons, traditionally. Apparently you have to scrape off the fat after skinning the animal because the fat has a “musky, swampy” flavour and is not attractive to many palates. Once cooked properly, Natives Americans agree, raccoon is delicious! On the subject of native food, Steve described the harvest of his sugar bush as “poor”. This year’s maple sugar run was not a good one, owing to the lack of sunny days to go with the cold nights.

Steve agreed to plant a White Oak by the gate on his way out. After he left, I pattered around the camp, but went on no walks, as the tree-planting had left me a bit weary.

***Joke:** (Novice birder stumbles onto sexual dimorphism.)

Expert birder: “Now, over there you can see a Cardinal, clearly a male.”
Novice: “Boy, you must have really good eyes!”

Birds: (16)

American Crow (EW); American Goldfinch (HP); American Robin (GF); Bald Eagle (LM); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (FCF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

Phenology: Tree Swallows, American Goldfinches back, Trout Lily bloom started

Trail Cam Log:

one wild turkey hen, one domestic dog* (shepherd/mutt cross)

*This is only the second record of a domestic dog on the property over 12 years !

IMAGES:



yellow Trout Lily (About 5% are now in bloom)
We also have the white variety, but those bloom a little later.



Red Squirrel raids tray feeder on Hickory. In the Appalachians this squirrel is sometimes called a “Chickaree”. So, this must be a “Hickory Chickaree”,

Doc.