

Newport Forest

Tuesday May 10 2011

2:05 - 6:35 pm

Weather: Prec. 0 mm; RH 54%; BP 101.7 kPa; ovcst; SE 0-15 kmh; T 19° C

Purpose: trial visit

Participants: Pat, Kee

This was Pat's first time back at Newport Forest since her aneurysm operation. The property has dried out enough for easy access and Pat found herself once again immersed in the natural world. We were pleased to hear the American Toad chorus, now in full swing, with a few Chorus Frogs still audible in the pauses.

As Pat reclaimed herself, I wandered through the Regen Zone with several purposes in mind: Inspecting the young trees, I was happy to see all of them with early leaves or healthy buds; the ant mounds stand out in this season, with no surrounding vegetation to mask the independent city-states; I also wanted to rejig the watering flag scheme, replacing all the pink flags with yellow ones. These make smaller trees easier to spot, should they start showing drought stress. At one point I removed the tree-gard* from one of the more advanced trees, only to discover that the inner surface of the gard was covered with a dark green (blue-green) patch of algae. I took the gard as a sample. [* commercial name]

Pat went up the road a short distance to sit across from the old snag, her favorite birding spot. The surrounding trees and bushes harbour many species, including several that she spotted today. These included a Gray Catbird that was building a nest in a bush nearby, a Brown Creeper spiraling up a trunk, and a Wild Turkey hen eating gravel from the road. (presumably for her gizzard)

From scrap lumber under the trailer I knocked together a feeding tray to attach to the snag. Not to brag, but it would certainly qualify me for a spot on that new reality show: "Canada's Worst Handymen."

Back in the Regen Zone, I counted ant mounds as a preliminary to a mapping survey: 20 mounds, varying in height from about 20 to 30 cm. The mounds all have a common structure, the accumulated thatch and dirt-pebbles being knit together by grasses with a ring of new shoots at the top. (See image below.) The grasses "cooperate" with the ants in constructing the mounds. The Regen Zone, by the way, is nearly square, with an area of approximately one hectare.

Around this time, Pat wandered into the Blind Creek Forest along Edgar's trail. She felt frustrated by not being able to name a single bird. This was partly due to

the fact that all the birds were excitedly flying back and forth, searching for nesting sites, mates, or a tidbit to eat. And if the birds were too fast, her memory although now back, was still too slow. “Ohhh. I know that bird, darn it!”

I rearranged the watering flags so that the only trees flagged were a) those less than knee-high and b) the newly planted ones, whatever their height. There are seven young trees still left to plant, three in spuds and four bare-root. As for our Regen “forest”, some of the trees are now tall enough to cast a late-afternoon shade on the trailer. After these light duties, I went to relax in the Nook.

Before Pat returned from her walk, a motion near the old log caught the corner of my eye. A Raccoon was watching me warily from one side of the log. It wasn't the nursing mother, but a smaller individual, possibly only a year old and possibly the same individual that visited the camp a couple of weeks ago. I put out a little kibble for it, thinking it deserved as much just for making it through this last winter! As for the nursing raccoon mother, I couldn't be sure if she was still in the box. No churrs, purrs, whines, grunts or bumping sounds were heard coming from the box during our stay.

As usual, Chipmunks visited the feeders, along with one black (Eastern Gray) squirrel and two, mutually intolerant Red squirrels. Their scolding sounded more like burbling than chattering. Chipmunks and an Eastern Gray (black phase) squirrel competed with the Red Squirrels and birds for seed. While pondering signs of the spring breeding season all around me, I spotted a pair of Blue Herons flying majestically over the Fleming Creek Forest. Were their wingtips just touching? I couldn't be sure. Pat was now up at the Snag, enjoying the results of the new feeder tray.

Downslope on the Fleming Creek bluffs portion of the Gallery Forest, I spotted a Serviceberry in bloom and scrambled down the bluffs to take a photo. (See images below.) While photographing it. I noticed that the rapids have emerged once again as water-levels in the creek fall back to normal values. I also noticed that the yellow Trout Lilies have now ceased to bloom, even as the white Trout Lilies begin their decline.

After a dinner of grilled cheese sandwiches and soup, we emptied the trailer garbage. The outside can was full, its lid decorated by raccoon paw prints. While maneuvering the heavy bag out I got stung twice on my right hand, probably by one of the *Polistes* (paper) wasps that are always hanging around the trailer. The sting was characteristic and of short duration. (Interesting that the chemical

most Hymenopterans inject you with is formic acid, the venom!) After cleaning camp, we started up the new van and bade “everyone” farewell.

Birds: (23)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (HP); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (Tr); Brown Creeper (Snag); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (FCB); Common Yellowthroat (Hole); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Kingbird (LM/GF); Eastern Towhee (GF); Gray Catbird (GF); Great Blue Heron (FC); House Wren (GF); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Song Sparrow (GF); Tree Swallow (HBF); Turkey Vulture (BCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (LM/GF)

New Species:

‘Greenpatch Alga’ *Cylindrospermum [catenatum]* LM KD My10/11

Note (for aficionados): This is a blue-green alga (Cyanophyte) that is frequently found in moist subaerial or soil habitats. The likely ID is given, based on the size and physical characteristics of filaments, including the tendency for heterocysts to be the same size as adjacent cells.

Phenology:

Toad mating in full swing, Yellow Trout Lilies over, White Trout Lilies past their peak, Serviceberry in bloom.

Trail Cam:

One raccoon on two occasions, once at night, once during the day -- not the nursing mother

IMAGES:



One of the larger ant mounds is beside the weather station. Note rule marked in centimetres and ring of grass at top.



Amelanchier sp. (also called Serviceberry or Juneberry) now in bloom, as this view, taken down the branch of a sapling, shows. Fivefold symmetry of flowers betrays a member of the Rose family.



Local History & Human Ecology Dept.: Here is a curious spot just north of Wardsville on our way home along Hwy #2. This ancient one-room schoolhouse is now a curiosity shop called **Made on Earth**. (The proprietor may well have extraterrestrial connections.)