

Newport Forest

Saturday May 28 2011

2:25 - 7:10 pm

Weather: prec. 65 mm; RH 94%; BP 101.3 kPa; s to 25 kmh; cld/sn; 22° C

Purpose: mapping ant mounds

Participants: Kee

Edgar Hurdle, who lives across the road from the Newport Forest gate, was out vacuuming the family Jeep when I pulled up. I checked the beaver story that Ruth Ann told us last week. "Yup. And they've already cut down some pretty sizable poplars down there by the creek, too." I shuddered.

The property was very wet after the heavy rain (65 mm = 2.6") but the trees were growing and the birds were singing. They care nothing for La Nina and the Pacific Oscillation.

Once I had set up camp, I made a quick tour of the Regen Zone, noting in particular that the two Buckeyes we planted back in 2002 were finally starting to grow after spinning their wheels for the last 9 years. With barely one cm of new growth a year, they have both gone into overdrive, producing leaders of about 30 cm length! The Ohio Buckeye looks a little more robust than the Yellow Buckeye, a mere 4 m away.

I relaxed in the Nook before tackling the mound-mapping project, enjoying the sights of a Chipmunk and (black) Gray Squirrel raiding the bird-feeding trays. There was little of note going on in the birding world, but at one point during this spell a flight of exactly 66 Canada Geese overflew the Lower Meadow.

I messed up last week's attempt to grid the Lower Meadow so I had to start out all over again today. I set yellow marker flags every ten metres along the road at the base of the Lower Meadow and did the same up the road past the trailer. This left me with an oblique axis system with an angle of 120° at the origin. Since there were six ten-metre strips in both directions, there would be 36 "squares" within the plot area, each one a parallelogram with 10-metre sides and interior angles of 120° and 60°. Nothing daunted, I staked out the first row of squares inside the meadow so that I could at least map out one complete row. Systematic searching within each square produced seven mounds altogether. Their position and basal diameters were noted on my map, but little else.

I was also interested in the grasses that grow on these mounds, noting that the larger mounds always seemed to sport a ring of grass growing on top in the

manner of a crown with a bald spot in the middle that was covered with thatch.

Back in the Nook for a few more sips of live ants from my coke can, I was surprised by the visit of a Raccoon, this one different from the one last week. It was also a female, but well-furred and glossy, with an overall chestnut hue to her coat. (See IMAGES below.) I am guessing that she is the one who had the nursery box. If so, she has moved her kits to another location.

Although the sky had been only partly cloudy when I arrived today, by 5 pm it had become overcast and a cool wind began to blow -- the kind that precedes a rain. I made haste to visit the two trail cams to change the SD cards, unaware that #2 had picked up a great image. Both cameras are mounted inside the Blind Creek Forest area, a place best regarded as a gamut when the mosquitoes get really thick. Today they were more noticeable than last week, but Armageddon is on the way.

I was thinking of leaving early when Pat reminded me by cellphone that I was supposed to take care of the last little tree, a 10-cm Big Shellbark Hickory. I planted it across from the trailer, where I could keep an eye on it.

At 6:30 pm the same Raccoon returned to eat more kibble. Although birds were singing all around me, the actual number of species showing themselves was distinctly lower than on recent visits. Walking up the track toward the hydro lines, I amused myself by watching a Great Crested Flycatcher hawking insects from the lower branches of the old Red Oak in the Gallery Forest. Like all of our flycatching species, from the Wood Peewee to the Eastern Kingbird, it would flutter out into the air, snatch an invisible insect and return to its branch.

Birds: (16)

American Crow (BCF); American Robin (GF); Black-capped Chickadee (BCF); Blue Jay (Tr); Canada Goose (LM); Common Yellowthroat (GF/E); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Field Sparrow (HBF); Great Crested Flycatcher (FCF); Mourning Dove (LM); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wild Turkey (HL)

Phenology:

Spittle Bugs out; Dandelions in seed; first Monarch Butterfly; American Toads still calling. Add to phenology for May 22: Garlic Mustard in bloom

Note on mound grasses:

I found at least two distinct species of grass growing on the mounds that I examined closely. One of them I could not identify because it was not fruiting. The other appears to be Meadow Fescue, but this must be checked. To do a complete job of assessing the grasses that grow on these mounds, I will have to make a collection and give it to an expert.

IMAGES:



WILDVIEW

05-25-2011 08:13:08



Trail-cam #2: Like a morning mirage, this White-tail Deer pauses in mid-browse to check the Blind Creek landscape last wednesday. (Camera time stamps are now correct.)



Raccoon Identification -- Lesson Two: Here is the other mother in our lives. Note the solid mask, unicolored nose stripe and strongly accented eye-stripe -- with hints of a second stripe. Compare with last week's image of the other female Raccoon to see a very different face with a divided mask, bicolored nose stripe, and single eye stripes.