

Newport Forest

Sunday August 21 2011

2:05 - 6:35 pm

Weather: prec. 15 mm; RH 83%; BP 101.3 kPa; sun/cld; SSE 0-10 kmh; T 27° C

Purpose: to collect plants & insects

Participants: Pat, Kee

The argument arises in many different ways, but usually after Pat makes an interesting find and I express surprise. “I was just there and I didn’t see it!” “That’s because you’re always moving around. If you would just sit in one place, you’d see a lot more.” Pat is mistress of the art of quiet observation. So much so, our native friends sometimes call her Animal Magnet. If she were Delaware, that might be her name.

Her first find was a small yellow caterpillar decorated with rows of black dots and a dull orange head capsule. It looked like a moth caterpillar, but it wasn’t until I gave up searching through all the moth caterpillar information sources that I began to look at other alternatives -- like sawflies. Bingo. The Birch Sawfly.

The wind became very gusty and there were few birds calling and even fewer at the feeders. Returning from a spell of birdwatching at the Snag however, Pat spotted a Rubythroat in the Lower Meadow. Butterflies were not much out, either, except that every second one we saw today was a Giant Swallowtail. They have never been so common.

We decided finally to walk beneath the powerlines as they offered a unique habitat. Once we got to an open area we call the Powerline meadow, we found spider heaven, with Black-and-Yellow Argiopes on every other plant or bush. We kept running into their tough “bridge lines” (from which the orbs are hung) that arrested our motions almost like fence wire. Pat wondered if they thought the power lines were spun by a really big spider, someone they could look up to!

Pat pointed out an odd-looking spider with cone-shaped tubercles studding its abdomen. I took several pictures and field notes, knowing that I had never seen this species before, but with vague memories of something similar in our spider manuals. Again, it turned out to be another orb-weaver called *Acanthepeira*. I was just finishing my notes when Pat pointed out a rather large wasp with yellow legs visiting a Purple Loosestrife plant in bloom nearby. It reminded me of the digger wasps we used to see at A’Nowaghi Forest Ponds. More field notes.

The Animal Magnet was in full gear, but spent more time on plants than animals,

filling her “Bowles Scroll” (a long plastic rectangle into which plants can be folded, then rolled up to conserve space) with a dozen finds, a few of which might be new species. The only thing I found today that Pat didn’t see first was a Common Buckeye, out on the access road under the power lines. A gorgeous butterfly with prominent “eyes” on all four wings.

Later on, changing the trail cam SD cards, I spotted a rolled-up goldenrod leaf and found an earwig inside. Was it the long-sought Spined Earwig? (our only native Earwig) I couldn’t take an effective image because I had forgotten to load the Nikon with its SD card. But it looked promising, the furcula being less strongly curved than the European Earwig. Did the furcula have a spine on it? No? Maybe it was a female. (Hope springs eternal.)

We saw no Chipmunks during this visit. The feral cat seen two visits ago may be responsible for the sudden scarcity.

Birds: (9)

Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (BCF); Common Yellowthroat (LM); Mourning Dove (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (LM); Song Sparrow (LM); Turkey Vulture (TR);

New Species:

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Great Golden Digger Wasp | <i>Sphex ichneumoneus</i> | PLM pd/KD Au21/11 |
| Birch Sawfly | <i>Arge pectoralis</i> | GF pd/KD Au21/11 |
| Star-bellied Orbweaver | <i>Acanthepeira stellata</i> | PLM pd/KD Au21/11 |
| Crab Grass | <i>Digitaria sanguinalis</i> | PLM PD Au21/11 |

Notes: The first three species above are all quite distinctive and cannot be mistaken for anything else. The Birch Sawfly larvae puzzled us, though, as we have precious little birch of any kind on the property. There’s a young Yellow Birch near the trailer, but Pat believes she found the larva in the gallery forest. It may be that the larva attacks other trees in the Birch family, such as Ironwood or Blue-Beech, of which there are many.

Phenology: Asters coming into bloom, goldenrods 20% out.

IMAGES:



Powerline Meadow tends to have a scrubby appearance with shorter, sparser plants, owing perhaps to occasional sprayings by Ontario Power Corp. to suppress vegetation under power lines. As such it offers a somewhat different meadow habitat than the denser Lower & Upper Meadow. Among other things, it's a kind of spider heaven.



A rather large *Argiope* (look closely) spins its snare on some flowering Purple Loosestrife, a sure venue for many visitors. (This was the largest patch of the plant in the whole Powerline Meadow.)



As storm clouds gather to the northwest, a blessing from above touches the land. Just before this image was taken, a massive F3 tornado struck the town of Goderich, about 75 mi to the north, destroying many houses and buildings.

A tank for watering young trees during drought years can be seen in the middle distance. The sign beside the gate indicates a Thames Talbot Land Trust property. .