

Newport Forest

Tuesday September 6 - 7 2011

2:45 - 6:25 pm

Weather: precip: 6 mm; RH 77%; BP 102.1 kPa; cloud/sn; N 0-15 kmh; T 21° C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Pat, Kee

As I opened the property gate, we were welcomed by a juvenile Leopard Frog, one of the animals for which we keep constant records of casual sightings. They appear to be still present in the Upper Meadow. Generally speaking, all of the Newport amphibian species have been maintaining their respective populations.

As we set up camp, a Question-mark butterfly landed on me, rather like a Comma Butterfly did during my previous visit. What is it with these Anglewings?

Inside the trailer, I spotted a crab spider along the edge of the sink, observing it closely enough to note the size and all the markings. I think I know the species of *Xysticus* it happens to be, but with no image, I must hesitate. Later, out for a hunt along Edgar's Road with the Nikon, I came upon a largish, very colourful spider on some foliage beside the road. I took several photos but, in the end, got only two usable images, both slightly blurry. Although I am fairly sure it's an Anyphaenid ("Ghost") Spider, I can't even guess a genus ! (I later reviewed close to a hundred species in this family without getting any closer. There are about 32 species in the US & Canada, with and over 100 species globally.)

While Pat watched for birds at the Snag, I walked to the river, my way impeded at every step by tall Wingstem plants bent double over the trail. I toyed with the idea of hacking them all away with the brush hook, but could not bring myself to destroy a hundred plants that are ranked as vulnerable (and threatened) in Ontario. The River is still slightly up, with Mussel Beach slimy from the recent rains. I found some very clear Coyote tracks on the beach, as well as some *Quadrula* mussels freshly deposited. While I was down at the beach, collecting what might be a new species of Smartweed for her, Pat was observing a flock of (she estimates) about a thousand Grackles, wheeling in a grey cloud nearby.

After supper, we drove to the Upper Meadow to close the gate and dropped in on the Hurdles for a brief social visit and to pick up the local scuttlebutt. Edgar Hurdle mentioned that Bill Fennell, a large landowner in the Skunk's Misery area had seen a cougar two weeks ago beside Skunk's Misery. (See end of report for details.)

Although the idea of a Cougar nearby was not exactly a morale-raiser for Pat, we went back down to the trailer to settle in for the night. We lit the oil lamps and stood watch for Raccoons at the bait area. At about 10 pm two adults showed up, joined later by a subadult who preferred bird seed from the Hickory feeder. The two adults had solid masks and we did not recognize them.

By midnight the air temperature had dropped to 12° C. The sky appeared to be clearing out after this, with several stars visible and a nearly full moon shining through a gap in the clouds to the south. A Green Frog called from the creek below the camp. So far, so good.

The next day dawned cloudy and grey, with a light rain that started in mid-morning and lasted, off and on, for the rest of the day. We had hoped to make it a three day stay, but diminishing returns had obviously set in. Nevertheless, we had a very productive walk to the “Copse” (see image below), where we found a fungus we should have collected years ago, the famous (and delectable) Fried Chicken Mushroom. We continued on to the swale in the Upper Meadow, where the vegetation changes markedly, being no longer dominated by goldenrods but by grasses, sedges and asters. Here Pat scoured the area for new thistles, finding a Bull Thistle which, we thought, was not on the list. It was.

On the way back, A Sharp-shinned Hawk flew low over the meadow, Earlier I had seen a pair of hawks cavorting around the powerlines. Taking another walk with my Nikon, I came across a small hoverfly investigating some goldenrod flowers, annoyed that my view was obscured by a twig that had fallen from a nearby tree right on top of the flower head. Then I realized that it was a stick insect, always a delight to encounter. (See images below.) Pat, meanwhile, sat up near the old dead Bittenut we call the snag, puzzling over some early fall warblers. They don't call them “confusing” for nothing. Only the best birders can sort them all out.

By mid-afternoon rain was getting too heavy to go out, so we decided to call it quits and make a two-day stay out of it, instead of a three-day. I went down to the creek to check a fish trap I had set that morning in a creek pool, only to find a lone Pumpkinseed which I promptly threw back in, along with the hamburger and bread bait as a reward for its patience.

Birds: (13)

American Crow (GF/E); American Robin (GF/E); Blue Jay (Tr); Canada Goose

(TR); Common Grackle (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Screech Owl (HP); Great Blue Heron (FCF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Sharp-shinned Hawk (LM); Turkey Vulture (BCF)

Bird note: Bird counts are generally down this summer. Last year, Pat and I would pick up between 20 and 30 birds per visit. This year it's about half of that - between 10 and 15. Other things being equal, that's quite a drop. We can't account for it, but we know which species haven't been showing up.

New species:

'Reclusive Crab Spider'	<i>Xysticus</i> sp.	Tr KD Sp06/11
Fried Chicken Mushroom	<i>Lyophyllum decastes</i>	CP KD Sp06/11
Canada St John's Wort	<i>Hypericum canadense</i>	LM/GF PD Sp06/11

Species note: The body of our mystery spider is about 6-7 mm long. The carapace is brownish-orange, with a medial row of darker spots fading to the rear; the abdomen is yellowish-white with a row of orange-brown bands that are bent forward at the front, but transverse to the rear, six in all. The legs are particularly interesting, being relatively thick with no taper and banded with the following colours in distal order: black, white, grey, yellow, black, red, black, white, black!

Big cat note: Fennell spotted the cat one afternoon in one of his hayfields along Concession Drive near the west corner of Skunk's. It was definitely a cat, he said, and "big as a deer", but not as tall. When it saw Bill, it "took off like a rocket", heading for a nearby swampy area. DNA analysis reveals that the cougar's closest living relative is the African Cheetah -- believe it or not. In any case, the speed of a charging (or fleeing) Cougar is unbelievable and (obviously) faster than a deer, its main menu item. There's more to this sighting, but those are the main features.

Phenology:

Ground nuts in bloom; goldenrod 100% in bloom; Katydid still calling

IMAGES:



Nikon 995

It is impossible to get a close-up image of a very long insect like this Northern Walking Stick without excluding at least half of it. In a resting position, as here, it extends its forelegs straight ahead, giving it an even more stick-like appearance. The head is where the forelegs (one with a reddish side) join the body. These insects seem to be common on the property, with one or two casual sightings a year.

Below: Green Dragon in fruit. This close relative of Jack-in-the-Pulpit begins its dieback early, even as its fruit ripens to a brilliant red. Green Dragon is ranked S3 (vulnerable) in Ontario as there are not many populations of this plant in the Province. This specimen is growing along the Fleming Creek trail near the creek itself.



FinePix



Finepix

The “Covse” is a relatively small open area inside the south end of the Gallery Forest that crowns part of the Fleming Creek bluff system. It seems to be a prime spot for fungi, many of which, like the *Lyophyllum* we picked up today, are mycorrhizal, meaning that their hyphae form a physical connection with the roots of surrounding trees, particularly the large Sugar Maple shown here at the north end of the Covse, or the large White Oak behind the camera. There are several younger Red Oaks at the edge of the creek bluff (to the right) as well as some Ironwoods and a few thorn trees.