

Newport Forest

Monday March 13 2012

2:05 - 6:30 pm

**Weather:** prec. 21 mm; RH 82%; BP 101.6 kPa; sn/cld; WSW 5-10\* kmh; 20° C

**Purpose:** to continue spring monitoring

**Participants:** Pat, Kee

\* gusting to 50 kmh

Owing to the rather soft terrain on site, I left the van by the road and walked in, while Pat stayed to clean out the boxes in our “bluebird trail”, a row of some six roadside boxes that were meant to house bluebirds, but more frequently sheltered Tree Swallows. At the camp I thought I could hear a frog chorus in the woods nearby, but couldn’t be sure. The meadow thermometer read a stunning 20° Celsius and the wind occasionally gusted to 40 or 50 kmh (according to our primitive little windspeed indicator). As I stood by the Nook, wondering what to do next, I was startled by a rather robust-looking Eastern Cottontail bounding through the open area and off into the Gallery Forest to the east. Cottontails are still with us, albeit not in large numbers, according to the tracking data.

When Pat finally arrived in camp, she remarked that the cleaning process had been fairly routine, but that one of the boxes was anything but routine. It was filled to the top with a downy substance like milkweed, contained a torpid wasp or two, a rather small colony of its cells, a *Phiddipus* jumping spider, an assortment of hickory nuts, some uneaten, and a mouse of the *Peromyscus* persuasion (either a Deer Mouse or a Whitefooted Mouse). It squeezed out of the box through a very narrow opening and was gone. No baby mice were present.

With Pat back, I was free to head off to the vernal ponds to check on the progress of the spring breeding season, definitely early this year. On my way to the ponds I spotted a pair of black squirrels chasing each other, as well as a pair of Blue Jays doing the same. Passing the first pool in the chain, I heard one, then two chorus frogs calling. At Edgar’s Elbow, I picked up another and then, further into the Blind Creek Forest, I counted another ten calling. (These are minimal figures.)

The resulting “chorus”, taken as a whole, could not yet be called a cacophony, but rather weak, typical of the first few warmish days as the wee chorus frogs find their way to the ponds.

I climbed the Hogsback slope to follow up on Pat’s suggestion: Was the Harbinger of Spring (a rare plant that grows there) in bloom yet? I couldn’t seem to locate the patches where they grow, but as I worked my way along the Hogsback slope, frequently sliding on the seeps, I did see a pair of anglewing

butterflies chasing each other, as well as a young Sugar Maple bleeding sap and covered with flies. At one point, as I sat down on some fallen logs to rest, a large brown animal fled. Raccoon? It ran like a Groundhog, but I couldn't be sure. We haven't seen one on site for years.

When I got back to camp, Pat pointed out that Chorus Frogs were also calling from the Fleming Creek Forest down on the floodplain. She also reported hearing a Grosbeak calling from the forest edge along the Lower Meadow and later, seeing a Wild Turkey tom strolling along the Fleming Creek Trail below her.

We had a dinner of weiners & beans in the trailer, not gracious dining but well supplied with "appetite sauce". Walking out, we picked up two more birds, a Mourning Dove calling from the Fleming Creek Forest and, up by the road, a flock of Common Grackles. Fears of a bird shortfall are now subdued.

### **Birds: (18)**

American Crow (UM); American Robin (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (HBF/LM); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (Rd); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Killdeer (Rd); Mourning Dove (FCF); Northern Cardinal (BCF/LM); Northern Flicker (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (HB); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (BCF/LM); Song Sparrow (LM); Turkey Vulture (FCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Nk); Wild Turkey (FCT)

### **Phenology:**

Birds: Common Grackle, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Song Sparrow, Turkey Vulture -- all back.

Other: first anglewing butterflies, start of frog chorus

### **Note on Cottontails:**

In previous issues of this Bulletin we have mentioned a seeming scarcity of Eastern Cottontail rabbits. Bill Taylor, a University of Waterloo Biologist, shares these observations on the subject: "You have mentioned the decline in cottontails. I noticed the same in Waterloo this fall-winter; they are usually very abundant on campus and in the nearby neighbourhood where I live. Had wondered if the decline was disease-related, as I don't think we have many coyotes in the city."

### **IMAGES (& "MOVIES")**

## Special Feature: Frog Chorus “Movie”



FinePix

To get an idea of what it's like to stand by well-charged vernal ponds in Newport Forest and listen to Western Chorus Frogs calling, simply start the sound track below by clicking once on the URL. When the Quicktime window jumps out in front, simply click anywhere on this page to bring the image back to your screen. It's early in the season, so today's chorus was somewhat weak, just like the one you're about to hear.

[http://www.amphibiaweb.org/sounds/Pseudacris\\_triseriata.wav](http://www.amphibiaweb.org/sounds/Pseudacris_triseriata.wav)





FinePix

There seemed to be lots of flies about today, not only around the trailer, but in the woods, as well. Here some metallic flies (Muscidae at a guess) enjoy the sap bleeding from a canker on a young sugar maple, crowding more thickly over the bleeding area.

Below, a study in deterioration. It has been five years since this Bitternut Hickory died. Since then it has been thoroughly invaded by fungi such as these Pear-shaped Puffballs (*Lycoperdon piriforme*) and dug out at least twice by Pileated Woodpeckers looking for insect larvae.

In 2006-07 there was a massive dieback of Bitternuts, thanks to the *Scolytus* Hickory Borer.



