

Newport Forest

Sunday March 18 2012

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 83%; BP 102.1 kPa; sn/cld; SW 5-10 kmh; T 28° C

Purpose: To find salamanders

Participants: Kee, Erin

“You’ll never guess the temperature!” It was Erin, calling out from the weather station. I tried to guess. Wrong. “Try 28 degrees!” I felt a certain foreboding.

Erin, who had already been on the property for some time before I arrived, had seen four Whitetail Deer running along the creek bluffs and had taken several excellent telephoto shots of a hawk flying low nearby. Even as I went to bring supplies from the van, she saw an Eastern Cottontail racing through the Nook -- just as I had on the previous visit. Erin is not only a Newport Steward, but an Aquatic Biologist with the St Clair Conservation Authority. We had hoped to find some new salamanders today, the weather being just about perfect. We were due for a disappointment in that project, but were happy with the many other signs of spring that we encountered.

Before we set out, Erin showed me a small Lady Beetle that Pat & I had seen many times before, always assuming that it was already listed. Not so. Then she spotted the first bumble bee of the season near the trailer.

The chorus in the Blind Creek Forest continued, with about the same number of males calling as on the last visit. On the previous evening, Erin had come into the property with several traps, setting them at strategic locations in two different ponds. Today she pulled up one after another: Nada. But by way of compensation, she found two new aquatic species for us, the Understriped Diving Beetle and a gigantic dark grey leech, apparently larger than any she had ever seen! The distinctive yellow lateral stripes made it an easy ID, with a little help from the *Leeches of Ohio*. (pdf) Luckily, there aren’t a lot of leech species in our area. As for the beetle, she had found it dead, floating on the surface, so I collected it. The underside of the abdomen was decorated with alternating black and reddish-yellow bands that enlarged into odd-shaped terga (plates) around the coxae (leg-bases).

Suddenly Steve Logan showed up. He and his wife Karen had come in for a visit and to drop off some items for Pat. Erin stayed in the ponds area for a while and I went back with Steve. After a pleasant lunch in the Nook, the Logans had to go, so Erin and I decided to walk the Thames River Trail, passing the river, then heading into Bluebell Woods, where we found the purple-green bluebell shoots

just emerging from the nutrient-laden silt. We took a side-trip to the Sand Bar area, where huge heaps of beach-quality sand have been deposited over the years. At this time of year, with little vegetation still out, one can make out the shape and size of the entire area. (See IMAGES.)

Wild Turkeys called from the west as we continued our walk deep into the Beech-maple sector, then up to the Hogsback. There we left the trail to head for the giant Chinkapin Oak, noting lots of False Mermaid, Agrimony and other spring plants emerging -- along with numerous new grasses and sedges. The Harbinger of Spring area begins about 20 m east of the Chinkapin. They were at peak bloom today and we both took pictures.

Back in camp we made haste to clean up, as the sun, breaking through the clouds, was already low in the sky. As I drove away, a large Northern Harrier flew right in front of the van to settle in a tree at Ruth Ann Newport's place.

Birds: (13)

American Crow (FCF); American Robin (RSF); Bald Eagle (LM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF/E); Canada Goose (TR); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Northern Harrier (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Turkey Vulture (LM); Wild Turkey (RSF/W)

New Species:

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|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 'Two-striped Leech' | <i>Haemopsis plumbeus</i> | VP EC Mr18/12 |
| Spotted Lady Beetle | <i>Coleomegilla maculata</i> | Nk EC Mr18/12 |
| Understriped Diving Beetle | <i>Dytiscus fasciventris</i> | VP EC Mr18/12 |
| Yellow-washed Metarranthis | <i>Metarranthis obfirmaria</i> | Nk KD Sp17/06 |

Note: It took more than six years before I could ID the *Metarranthis*! I found this moth sipping some spilled fruit juice late on a warm september night but did not collect it for fear of spoiling its dinner. However, I made a careful drawing of details on the wings as it was so preoccupied. A pattern-match showed up only recently on the web. (See IMAGES)

Phenology: first Bumblebee out; Harbinger of Spring at peak bloom; Virginia Bluebells emerging (2-3")

IMAGES:



FinePix

Erin provides some human scale for these immense piles of sand deposited by the river when in high flood (well above Erin). The current is slowed by trees and bushes, releasing the sand from suspension.



FinePix

Harbinger of Spring is just that -- one of the first spring ephemerals to come into bloom. Indeed, as Erin pointed out, some of the flowers had already begun to shed petals. The plant is small, with delicate white flowers and reddish stems. It is considered “rare” in Ontario.



Source: Tom Murray @ pbase

Individuals of Yellow-washed *Metarranthis* Moth show considerable variation. Our moth differed from the one shown in several respects, with the anterior dark red zone more heavily ornamented with black speckles, while the light cross-band and posterior zone were almost free of them. In some individuals the anterior border of the medial band is entirely absent or the ground colour is dark brown, the terminal border of the forewing is lobed or unlobed, etc. *Metarranthis* is a Geometrid moth.

Visit <http://www.pbase.com/tmurray74/bugs> to peruse enormous galleries of moths and other insects. The number of moth images on the web has grown exponentially, but we will never give up our *Field Guide to the Moths of Eastern North America!*