

Newport Forest

Wednesday March 21 2012

2:15 - 8:15 pm

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 68%; BP 102.4 kPa; calm; clear; T 30° C

Purpose: monitor frog chorus & leafing out

Participants: Kee

The heat on site today could only be described as “alarming.” Not only are regional records being broken on a daily basis, but we may be setting up for a killer frost when colder weather finally settles in. The ground is slowly donning its herbaceous underwear and leafing out its suits of dogwood and rose.

For the third time in as many visits, as soon as I showed up at the Nook, a healthy-looking Cottontail raced through it and off into the Gallery Forest. (Why didn't I remember and have my camera ready?) Listening carefully to the chorus from the Blind Creek Forest, I heard the romantic trill of American Toads joining in, along with intermittent calls from Gray Tree Frogs, a rapid chucking burble coming from trees by the vernal ponds.

I went down to examine Fleming Creek, finding the trail so heavily involved in seepage from the bluffs, that it was tricky just getting down to the landing. The creek is now at near normal levels, but flowing more rapidly than usual. I climbed directly back up the bluffs, rather than return by the trail.

Off on the Thames River Trail, I went first to the river, still high enough to cover Mussel Beach. Then up to the bluffs, where I immediately encountered several bushes and small trees with wee birds flitting here and there. “Kinglets”, I thought, but stared in vain for crowns of either gold or ruby. Perhaps I was too far away. Perhaps they weren't Kinglets, but warblers of some kind.

As if to compensate for my failure to see Kinglets with crowns, I had a close encounter, of a kind, with a Bald Eagle. I don't know why it was swooping so low down the bluffs toward the river, but it came so close my head (directly over), that I heard the bird a second or two before I saw it, the effect being something like this:

whuff-whuff- whuff-whuff-whuff-whuff

It couldn't have been more than three metres above me. It swooped down to the river, where it wheeled majestically, white head & all, to head downstream and disappear around the bend.

In the riverine part of the Riverside Forest, I stopped to examine the Virginia Bluebells, measuring them to an average between three and four inches. No sign yet of blooms, even though another strain in our garden at home have the same size, but sport blooms, as well. No other ephemerals were flowering yet, either. Passing into to the Beech-maple interior, I came upon a newly-fallen Box Elder, presumably toppled by the 50-60 kmh winds we experienced last week.

Descending from the Hogsback into the Blind Creek area, it puzzled me that the frog chorus was no louder than it had been during the last visit, even with two new species calling. In the distance a black Eastern Gray Squirrel cavorted near the base of a tree. Back in camp I discovered two Wood Ticks on my person, intrigued once again by the minute mystical designss on their abdomens. As night fell, a lone female raccoon showed up to glean bird seed from the base of the Hickory by the trailer. Time to leave, so I drove out to the road.

As I fussed with the increasingly stiff combination lock to close up for the day, I heard the faint but unmistakable buzz of a Woodcock over by the West Ravine. Goodnight everybody!

Birds: (17)

American Crow (BCF); American Robin (BCF); American Woodcock (UM/WR); Bald Eagle (RB); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF); Common Grackle (RB/W); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF/LM); Northern Flicker (EW); Red-bellied Woodpecker (BCF); Song Sparrow (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (EW)

ID failures: “kinglets” on river bluffs, large hawk by EW, not Redtail or Harrier.

Phenology: Six-spotted Tiger Beetles out; Brown-headed Cowbirds back; American Toads and Gray Tree Frogs calling, first Wood Ticks, trout lilies 3”

Trail cam log:

Mr18 4:26 am, 5:02 am raccoon, Mr19 11:40 am black squirrel, 5:47 pm chipmunk; Mr20 7:06 am raccoon; 8:28 am chipmunk; 6:05 pm chipmunk; Mr21 2:54 pm black squirrel

IMAGES:



FinePix

Virginia Bluebells and Garlic Mustard slug it out for possession of the Bluebell Woods terrace. The Garlic Mustard is not doing very well, I'm afraid.



FinePix

A thin layer of new vegetation gives Blind Creek Forest the appearance of a parkland -- bordered in the distance by the Lower Meadow terrance.



Trail Cam #3

Our current resident female probably has young stashed away somewhere, possibly in the nursery box. Is she heading down to the creek for a drink?. Nursing puts a heavy demand on rehydration.

Although we do feed raccoons on occasion, it is rare for more than one “family” to benefit in a significant way, owing to their highly territorial response to an intermittent food supply. *Ausländer Sind Verboten!* Thus there is no population explosion to speak of.