

Newport Forest

Wednesday April 4 2012

2:25 - 6:35 pm

Weather: Prec. 12 mm; RH 62%; BP 101.3 kPa; N 10-50 kmh; Clear; T 12° C

Purpose: Preparing for April events

Participants: Pat, Kee

Such a beautiful sunny day -- but such a wind! It blew straight from the north and seemed chillier than the +12° C registering on the meadow thermometer. The birds were mostly hunkered down on the ground, in bushes, in tree hollows, and so on. We sheltered in the trailer and discussed the two upcoming Thames-Talbot events over coffee: The Bluebell Walk (unscheduled as yet) and the Work Day (April 21). In the latter case, there is junk to be removed, deadfall to be cut, road to be repaired, and trails to be lined. We ventured outside.

We were mildly surprised to find many digs here and there along the road near the trailer, digs that could have been made either by skunk or squirrel, although the pattern was skunk-like. Early on, before donating the property, we had permitted the release of some 5 young skunks on rehab. Prior to the release, we had never seen any skunks or signs of same over an eight-year period! Following the release we saw one several months later, then about two years later, another full grown animal. But nothing since then.

It was time for a walk. We went to the river, finding the fierce wind somewhat uncomfortable. So Pat worked her way back to the trailer, while I continued on the Thames River Trail, up over the bluffs and into the Riverside Forest. I found two deadfalls that would have to be cleared by someone with a chainsaw on Work Day. Further on, I came to Bluebell Woods, where the Virginia Bluebells are now coming into bloom. Almost. The emergence is early, but I noted some apparent frost damage from recent cold nights and I wondered how that would affect the finished product.

The riverine and beech-maple components of the Riverside Forest still have an open parkland look and this enabled me to concentrate on the "stems" (trunks large & small). The percentage of stems below a certain diameter can be determined and then used to estimate the age or stage of a woodland: How many years before the forest is mature and in a steady-state climax?

I went up and over the Hogsback in double-time to stay out of the wind, then descended into the Blind Creek Forest, where the air was warm and still. I listened intently for any frogs calling. Nothing. Too cold? What's wrong with 12° C?

Two interesting birds showed up in the woods, flying low over the leaf litter, then perching in some bushes to my left. One of them walked along the top of a log long enough for me to see that it was a thrush, like a fat little robin with large speckles on its breast and a faint flush of orange below that. Back at the trailer, Pat gave me her birdlist and we discussed the thrushes. Hermit Thrushes were migrating through at this time of year, Wood Thrushes were returning, and maybe they were Veerys! Sometimes amateur birder are doomed never to know!

We measured the trailer for a long overdue paint job (not a Work Day item). As we packed up to leave camp, this year's resident Raccoon Mother showed up once again to glean birdseed from the ground below the Hickory feeder tray.

Birds: (15, incl. the "thrush")

American Crow (BCF); American Robin (HBF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (TR); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Northern Flicker (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Song Sparrow (GF); Turkey Vulture (HBF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

Note: About half of the birds listed above made their presence known in the last hour of our stay, after the wind began to abate.

Phenology: Skunk Cabbage half grown, most spring ephemerals now in bloom

Trail Cam Record:

We now have three trail cams on site. #1 is at Edgar's Elbow, #2 is at the Hole, #3 is downhill from the Nook. Thanks to the amount of data, we introduce a new, more compressed format: cam#: species, month/date (number of "captures"). Each capture may involve one individual or more and consecutive captures may involve the same individual(s), depending in part on the time-separation.

#1: Virginia Deer 3/28 (2) 3/29 (1) 3/30 (1)

#2: Eastern Cottontail 4/02 (1) Eastern Gray Squirrel 3/31 (1) 4/04 (2) Virginia Deer 4/01 (13) 4/03 (2) Wild Turkey 3/29 (1) 3/31 (1) 4/03 (1)

#3: Eastern Gray Squirrel: 3/28 (4) 3/29 (2) 3/31 (3) 4/01 (3) 4/02 (3) 4/03 (1) 4/03 (2) Raccoon 3/28 (2) 4/01 (1) 4/02 (3)

IMAGES:



FinePix

As the river slowly drops, three gravel/clay bars emerge from the murky water. These are the “backbone” of Mussel Beach and at this rate the beach will be fully emerged in another week or so. Last year’s rains kept the river high enough to submerge the beach for most of 2011. This year we anticipate a drier climate and many walks by the river.

Three Canada Geese swim beyond the third bar. How good are your eyes?

Note the foreground trees and the distant willows leafing out.



FinePix

Purple Wood Violets are now in full bloom. There are several species of similar violets growing at Newport Forest, with colours of blue, white, yellow & cream.



WILDVIEW

04-01-2012 21:22:20



TrailCam #2

Three Virginia Deer congregate at the Hole. (partial third deer at upper left) Deer frequently rub the top of the meter-post or sniff it for the scent of other deer. Olfactory email.