

Newport Forest

Sunday April 29 2012

2:55 - 8:15 pm

Weather: Prec. 0mm; RH 20%; BP 102.8 kPa; sun/haze; calm; T 20° C

Purpose: Looking for snails

Participants: Pat, Kee

Driving through the Upper Meadow, we heard a Field Sparrow call and once past the Mudhole (now all dry & dressed), we were escorted down to the trailer by a Red-tailed Hawk which “peeled off” as soon as it was sure we’d make it.

Our purpose today was to collect more Gastropods. Pat had some success by the creek, picking up the shells of three aquatic snails. Later, when searching for more slugs, I found none under a variety of logs I rolled over. It occurred to me that they may have retreated further below the surface debris, owing to the exceptionally dry weather. We have *never* seen the humidity this low on site -- 20%, as opposed to readings in the low 30s. That’s pretty dry!

While down by the creek, Pat also collected a Buttercup in flower (2P) that she wanted to check, owing to its rather large blossoms.

The trail cams seem to be in revolt, demanding new batteries almost every visit now, as they take more images. However, Cam 3 was replaced by a new one and the failed battery supply for Cam 2 left no useable images this time, so the Trail Cam report is down to one functioning camera for this Bulletin (See below.)

This disappointment was quickly compensated for by the appearance of a Brown Thrasher at the top of the Black Maple that shades the Nook. I had a good look at it through the binos before it flew off into the Gallery Forest -- our name for the strip of trees that crown the creek bluffs next to the Lower Meadow. The heavily streaked breast, tail as long as the rest of the body, relatively large size and overall brown colour left us in no doubt.

We decided to head for the river and check out the now fully emerged Mussel Beach, an expanse of heavy gravel/clay that extends out into the river by several meters from the base of the bluffs. On the way Pat pointed out a vulture-sized bird above the trees ahead of us. “Is that a Baldie?” The wing dihedral was flat, typical of the Bald Eagle, but the Turkey Vulture will occasionally glide flat, so we couldn’t add it to the list.

We walked the shoreline, looking for tracks of the Spiny Softshell Turtle, finding

only Deer, Raccoon, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose and two smaller species of wading shorebird, probably the Spotted Sandpiper and Killdeer. Pat worked her way ahead while I stood where I was, staring dully at something or other. Pat suddenly called out: "Look, a duck is flying in." We watched it come upriver to settle on the beach about 80 m upstream. "That's no duck", I said. Through the binoculars it was clearly a giant Killdeer, but lacking the white collar. Was it possible for a Killdeer to be nearly twice the normal size? Pat pointed out that it had yellow legs. As I watched, it began to teeter with increasing frequency, rather like the Spotted Sandpiper. Then it suddenly flew off across the river as I was about to try for a long distance image. (better than none). The camera caught it in mid flight, showing a blob of white on the body.

Starting back to camp, Pat visited one of the drift piles by the landing, finding yet a third Yellow-soled Slug, while I had no luck under logs further inland. It was not going to be a big gastropod day after all, but not a bad birding day -- for us.

While a shepherds pie heated up in the trailer, two raccoons made early visits to the Nook to glean birdseed. The first was one of "our" females in reasonably good condition, the second was a scrawny, rumple-coated very dark creature with the blackest mask we'd ever seen, solid across the face and extending farther than normal around the sides of the head. Over the years we have heard many stories about "swamp coons" that are supposed to be "all black" or very dark, at any rate. One can't help wondering if our visitor's pelage was driving the rumours. The colour label can be deceptive. For example, if I was (literally) a "white" man, they'd rush me off to the hospital with terminal anemia!

We stayed until nearly sunset, listening for woodcocks and noting a lone Striped Chipmunk dashing across the Nook. Just before leaving, I scurried down to Vernal Pond C to get a microbial sample for later examination.

New Species:

Greater Yellowlegs* *Tringa melanoleuca* TR PD Ap29/12

Birds: (21)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (GF/E); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Brown Thrasher (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Grackle (VPs); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (Ho); Field Sparrow (UM); Greater Yellowlegs (TR); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Northern Flicker (FCF); Red-

bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-winged Blackbird (ER); Red-tailed Hawk (LM); Song Sparrow (FC); Tree Swallow (GF); Turkey Vulture (HBF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); White-throated Sparrow (Nk)

Best birds: Brown Thrasher, Greater Yellowlegs

*As a check, we include this somewhat sparse description of the bird seen. It was about 80m along the beach and stayed on our side of the river for only two or three minutes before flying over to the other side. 1. long, bright yellow legs 2. dark back, white underparts, 3. tail flashed white in flight, 4. teetered more frequently just before taking off, 5. definitely larger than a Killdeer. (When it first flew in, we thought it was a small duck, like a Blue-winged Teal, for example.) We have seen Killdeers at the river on many occasions.

Trail Cam Record: (#3 back in service, #2 offline with dead batteries)

#1: Virginia Deer Ap26 (2)

Readers Write:

(Dave Martin is a local naturalist and well-known bird expert.)

Dave points out that it is common at this time of year for deer to shed their winter coats in small tufts, leaving whitish patches that may resemble spots. He wonders if the “fawns” shown in our image (Trail Cam #1) in the April 21st issue were really that. We were perhaps “fooled” by the tendency of fawn spots to fade from below upward, leaving a few faint spots around the flanks. It must be admitted that the appearance of nearly full grown fawns this early in the season would be rather unusual, what with tracks of much younger fawns seen only a week or two before this. Live & learn.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The *Annual Spring Wildflower Walk* is scheduled for this coming Sunday at 1:00 pm, with a second walk scheduled for 3:00 pm.

Be sure to bookmark Erin Carroll’s website at <http://erintown.blogspot.ca/> and click on the “Newport Forest Workday” in the right hand sidebar. It’s a great website, full of information about local venues and events!

IMAGES:



FinePix

Continuing our spring flower theme, This Golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*) is still in the act of flowering, with one umbel yet to expand. This species seems to occur singly at Newport Forest and rarely in patches or groups. Always a cheerful sight.



Courtesy Richard Janik

This image of a Coyote or Brush Wolf passing through the Janik Forest (neighbouring Newport to the west along the river) was taken by one of Richard Janik's newly acquired trail cams -- obviously better instruments than the ones we've been using. Richard, who lives in Windsor, visits the general area less frequently than we do.

The Janik property is about the same size as Newport Forest and features a very large stand of conifers planted many years ago by Richard's father and now a prime deer yarding area.