

Newport Forest Bulletin

Monitoring Nature

Date & Time: Wednesday June 6 2012 2:20 - 7:20 pm

Weather: prec. 17 mm; RH 53%; BP 101.7 kPa; sn/cld; SW 0-10 kmh; T 27° C

Purpose: light maintenance & environmental scan

I was greeted at the gate by an Eastern Kingbird perched on the gatepost while two Tree Swallows flew circuits overhead. Down at the camp I put out birdseed and sat in the Nook. Recalling how a weasel had appeared during the last visit, I said to myself, “Well, don’t expect to see any chipmunks,” But Newport Forest



contradicts our expectations at every turn. One scampered up the Black Maple to fill its cheeks at the bird feeder, as in the file image above. Has the weasel left?

The weather was beautiful, sunny and warm on site, with a freshness in the air that often follows a period of rain. Readers will note that the 17 mm we got -- our June precipitation to date -- is rather less than areas further north (or south for that matter) received.

Today's "maintenance" involved tagging all the trail distance marker stakes along the Thames River Trail with fluorescent paint so they will stand out more. The purpose is to provide a means of specifying locations of finds or observations.

I was psyching up in the Nook, about to set off, when a pickup truck rolled into camp. It was Stan Caveney, who had brought a load of U-bar marking posts for a crew that will be going out soon to mark the eastern boundary of the TTLT property. (See the map in IMAGES below.) He asked about the large scat we had found two visits ago. "Wanna see it?" I had the box open to the sun. Stan seemed suitably impressed. I mentioned the Kingbird at the gate. "I hate them", said Stan. "They're gobbling up all the dragonflies at our pond." The Caveney's own and manage a large natural area called Meadowwoods just north of Lake Erie. We discussed the recent rains. Meadowwoods got close to 60 mm. Jealousy seized me.

I proceeded along the Thames River Trail, dividing my time between markers and carrying out my "environmental scan" (a vague term that means almost anything). Thus I missed several of the stakes and had to go back. For example, a pair of Robber Flies mating on a leaf, made me miss the 200 metre stake. On the bluffs I noted that the river is up again, thanks to the recent rains, and Mussel Beach has disappeared beneath murky brown runoff. Three Canada Geese paddled into view upstream and a Great Blue Heron flew briefly out from the mouth of Fleming Creek. Continuing the circuit, I noted that the trails are rapidly getting overgrown and will need to be groomed soon. In the end, all 18 of the marker stakes got splashed with a bright pinkish hue that is hard to miss. Ugly but useful.

Back in camp, I rubbed tung oil into the wood of our newly refurbished canoe, covering it with polyethylene sheeting secured by bungee-cords. As soon as the river goes down again, we plan a trip up to Clam Island to check on the ever-fluctuating community of mussels on the shoals there. Kee Dewdney

Birds: (17)

American Crow (LM); American Robin (RSF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (Tr); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Yellowthroat (LM/HBF); Eastern Kingbird (Rd); Eastern Towhee (GF/HBF); Field Sparrow (LM); Great Blue Heron (TR); Northern Cardinal (LM); Northern Flicker (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (RSF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (Rd);

Precipitation Report:

This ten-year summary tabulates total precipitation on site for two statistics: precipitation to the end of May and total precipitation. Note how lower annual totals

| year: | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| My31: | 182 | 138 | 301 | 377 | 284 | 456 | 442 | 230 | 580 | 219 |
| total: | 756 | 617 | 667 | 1020 | 674 | 1227 | 926 | 744 | 1243 | |

seem to correlate with lower figures for the first five months, respectively. Given a regional average precipitation of 973 mm (source: Canadian Climate Normals), we take as “drought-level” annual precipitation any figure below 800 mm. Thus 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2010 were “drought years” by this definition. (A true drought may take several years to develop.) Based on the major trend in these data, our prediction for the annual total over 2012 is 515 mm (give or take). That is not good.

Trail Cam Record

Cam #1: Virginia Deer Je02 (1)
Cam #2: Raccoon Je02 (1) Je04 (1)
Cam #3: Eastern Cottontail Je03 (1), Eastern Gray Squirrel Je03 (1) Je04 (1) Je05 (1), Raccoon My31 (1), Je01 (1) Je01 (1) Je02 (1) (1) (1) (3) Je03 (3) Je04 (2) (1) Je05 (1)

IMAGES:



Lumix

Two Robber Flies (*Laffria index*) caught *in flagro delecti* -- or as Pat calls it, *flygro delecti* -- by our new Lumix camera. Robber Flies belong to the family Asilidae and so are sometimes called “Asilids”. They are mostly predacious on other flies. Note the very robust legs on our amorous predators. The femur of leg III bulges like a bicep; perhaps the third legs are the ones that snatch up victims.

Below: Appearing yellow with age, a map of Newport Forest under my (incandescent) desk lamp looks like some 17th century pirate map. This is for readers who want an idea of where some of the locales we write about are in the context of the place as a whole -- demarcated by dashed boundary lines. Fleming Creek (unlabeled) appears at lower right. Thames River Trail is indicated by the dotted line. The trailer is in the right hand lower corner of the Lower Meadow.

