

Time & date: Thursday June 14 2012 2:10 - 6:55 pm

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 72%; BP 102.4 kPa; calm; clear; 30° C

Purpose: trail maintenance with Brian, Steve, and guests

Steve brought in an old friend to work with us. Neil Cavallo is a Delaware from the original homeland between the Hudson and Delaware Rivers in New Jersey. He immediately reconnected with his beloved Newport Forest by taking a bath in the creek. Then, while Steve and Brian whined through the woods with their weed-eaters, (my favorite instrument of mass destruction) we went on to the River Landing and onto Mussel Beach, where Neil yelled, “Hey, I didn’t know you had



blue snakes here!” I went over to look, along with Yovani, a native from Ecuador who had come over from New York with Neil. I explained that most of the Eastern Garters (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) that we see at Newport Forest are blue morphs. The dorsal and lateral stripes are blue or blue/grey, with or without a black-and-blue checkered pattern between the stripes. I assume it’s a local popula-

tion. The species is famous for colour variations in virtually every combination. Some of these are regarded as subspecies, our own blue morphs most closely resembling the Florida Blue Garter! This particular individual was probably gorging itself on peep toads, then stopped for a bask in the sun.

We caught up with Steve and Brian having a break deep in the Riverside Forest. They had been doing a beautiful job, teaming up so that each weedeater worked one half of the trail as they went. It would take me a good two days of steady weed-whacking with a brush hook to get as far and as fine. The three of us (I, Neil and Yovani) then went on ahead. Yovani was keen to learn everything he could about North American forests. I showed him some edibles like Wild Garlic, a “medicine tree” like the Slippery Elm, and even our own version of the Amazonian “Quebracho” or Break-axe tree, the Ironwood. Along the way we dodged a delicate spider web over the trail and I noticed what looked like a very small *Argiope* in the middle of the web. It turned out to be a similar genus called *Mangora*. (See New Species below)

We had a late lunch in the Nook, exchanging gifts according to tradition, and discussing the state of the forest. Darren will come soon to cut deadfall across the trails and then we’ll be ready for visitors. Every discovery, every experience and adventure in this place must be paid for by the work of maintaining access.

Kee Dewdney

Birds: Under the circumstances it was pointless to keep a bird list for this visit.

New Species:

‘Black-striped Mangora’ *Mangora placida* HB/RSF KD Je14/12

According to Kaston’s pictured key to the spiders this was a female, being 5 mm in length by our measurement. Interested readers are free to request ID material.

Trail Cam Record: (a = am, p = pm, d = day, n = night)

Cam #1: Virginia Deer Je02 p/d (1)

Cam#2: Humans only

Cam #3: Eastern Gray Squirrel Je13 a/d (1); Raccoon Je10 p/n (1*) Je12 p/n (1*) (4*) Je13 p/n (1), Je14 a/n (1)

IMAGES:



We followed Steve and Brian into the Thames River Trail along this freshly cut pathway . . .



. . . and later watched them emerge, demonstrating their teamwork. With a dry summer anticipated, no further cutting should be required.