

Date and Time: Tuesday June 17 2012 2:10 - 7:20 pm

Weather: prec. 18 mm; RH 83%; BP 101.3 kPa; ovcast; calm; 26° C

Activity: Kee and Erin count Green Dragons along Blind Creek

Erin Carroll is a biologist with the St Clair Regional CA. She is also a Newport Forest Steward. Erin arrived before I did, leaving her car on the road and walking in. She sighted a Brown Snake and took photographs of several birds on her way. The Yellow Warbler in the image below attests to her “eye”.



Conveniently, Erin had brought her iPad on which we could monitor the progress of a storm system passing over the area. The heaviest rainfall was at Rondeau on Lake Erie, so things looked reasonably “safe”. We set out from the Elbow to search westward along the old creek bed. Each time we found a Green Dragon, we marked it with a yellow surveyor’s flag and Erin took a gps reading. At the same

time she was trying to keep track of the centre-line of the creek bed, but finally gave up, owing to the complication. “You know what? It would be a lot easier to do the creek during the winter.” Concentrating on the Green Dragons, we found they tended to be clustered in patches of a few metres extent.

Coming upon a large specimen, we would frequently discover one or more smaller plants growing in the immediate vicinity. It wasn't clear whether these had sprouted from the same corm (underground storage root) as the large plant or not. The question is important because the answer could change the count. We consulted Mike Oldham of the NHIC about this issue. (See below.)

Walking Blind Creek was a trial for both of us, even the youthful Erin, who also had to step over bulky deadfalls and trip on hidden deadwood. Worse yet, we somehow got turned around, not once but twice. Making our way along at one point, we came to a flag we had inserted earlier. Uh-oh! I mentioned the Blair Witch and retrieved the compass from my utility bag. “If the Witch is about,” I said, “this compass needle will swing wildly.” The needle swung wildly and Erin gasped. When the needle finally settled down, we continued the survey.

We encountered a few other species of interest. In beds that were otherwise nearly devoid of vegetation we found extensive patches of Sensitive Fern. We also found a stand of Cow Parsnips going for an altitude record, their stems already an inch or more thick. By the time we came to a giant fallen Willow (Black x), it had begun to rain again, so we set out directly through the woods. Emerging into the open at the Powerline Meadow, we walked through the wet, knee-high veg until our pants were completely soaked. Here we ran across the largest bunch of Blue-eyed Grass I had ever seen, a two-foot wide “rosette” of 50 stems or so, each twice as tall as the single specimens we routinely encounter in the Lower Meadow. I brought home a few stems for Pat to examine via Newcombe's Guide

After a rest in the Nook, we decided to search the hundred-metre “upstream” stretch of Blind Creek to the east as far as Blind Creek itself. Here we found two clusters of Green Dragon showing up on the riffles or high spots. Our total count now came to 36 stems. Not bad for a property that we initially thought had none!

Throughout these two excursions we had continued to note birds that we heard or saw, with Erin taking a succession of amazing photographs, almost worthy of a bird guide! I photographed a small red Marsh Fly (*Tetanocera plebja*) which preys on slugs (found on site ten years ago by entomologist Stan Caveney).

One more excursion, this time to the river, rounded out Erin's visit. The clay of Mussel Beach was slippery, thanks to the rain. One false step could either land you in the river or on the bank with the souvenir of a white butt. Erin was intrigued by the idea of "thunderstones", as local natives call them. These are heavy nodules of iron-sulphide/sulphate made by iron-loving bacteria in tropical soils. Thanks to continental drift, North America straddled the equator some 400 million years ago! Other Devonian remnants include brachiopod fossils that mark incursions of an inland sea that geologists call "The Tippecanoe".

As for today's shellfish, several species of mussel valves littered the beach. Erin made a collection to see how many species she could find, ending up with about eight. At one point we spotted a bird hunting insects over the river. It wasn't a Cedar Waxwing. Its flight reminded me of a bat. To clear up the confusion, Erin took a picture. "Ho'lee!" as our Delaware friends say, an Eastern Phoebe!

Another brief respite in the Nook brought us to closing time. Rusty the Swamp Coon showed up to sample bird seed. Later, after Erin had walked out, Betty showed up with her two half-grown kits. She looked at me sympathetically, I thought. "Don't you humans know enough to come in out of the rain?"

Birds: (17)

American Robin (BCF/ET); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF); **Brown Thrasher** (ET/VP3); Chipping Sparrow (GF); Common Yellowthroat (LM/HBF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); **Eastern Phoebe** (TR); Field Sparrow (LM); **Indigo Bunting** (GF/Sng); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Northern Flicker (GF/E); Red-bellied Woodpecker (BCF/TR); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (HBF); Yellow Warbler (UM)

New Species: (ID materials available on request)

'Yellow-headed Mirid'	<i>Prepops rubellicollis</i>	ET/VP KD Je17
Pygmy Grouse Locust	<i>Tetrix [arenosa]</i>	MB KD Je14/12

Correction: The Oldham List circulated with the last issue includes a species we inserted by accident: the Western Sedge (*Carex occidentalis*) should be deleted.

Phenology: Vernal Ponds have completely dried up

Erin's Website: Don't forget to visit "ErinTown" at <http://erintown.blogspot.ca/>

Readers Write: Mike Oldham, NHIC Botanist, has kindly responded to our request for clarification regarding multiple Green Dragons:

“ . . . Green Dragon can reproduce clonally via cormlets budding from the underground overwintering corm, as well as sexually via seed. One way to count them would be to count both flowering/fruited individuals and non-flowering individuals separately. Another way would be to use some sort of separation distance (e.g. a half metre) between "individuals", since smaller individuals very close to a larger plant are likely to be clonal while ones further away are likely to be seedlings . . . ”

IMAGES:



Walking the bed of Blind Creek, we came to this giant fallen willow. The bed is nearly bare, save for Sensitive Fern and a few other plants. Until a month ago it was a vernal pond. Numerous trunks and branches, most from the Bitternut dieback of 05-06, litter the bed. At this point it began to rain more heavily and we terminated the counting operation.



Erin demonstrates the faunal diversity of Mussel Beach with empty valves as surrogates for the animals themselves. Among her finds were *Quadrulas*, Heel-splitters, Muckets, Deer Toes and several other species. Gravel bar in background hosts a small lagoon where tadpoles have recently matured.