

Date and Time: June 30-31 2012

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 78%; BP 100.9 kPa; sn/hz; WSW 0-10 kmh; T 36° C

Activity: Pat and Kee host part of the Annual Skunks' Misery Butterfly Census with guests Hugh, Betsy and Garth Casbourn, Andrea Currie

Lighting the trailer refrigerator, I was surprised by a White-footed Mouse that leapt from the open compartment to the floor in front of me. Thanks to closed cabinet doors, blocking ingress, there was no weasel scat on the floor this time.



We immediately set about practicing our butterfly ID skills (such as they are). We noted that the Monarda (Bee-balm) was well into bloom, as above. The tubular florets of this plant contain nectar and are a great attractant for butterflies.

Switching to birds, Pat visited her favorite birding spot at “The Snag”, a huge dead Bitternut in the Gallery Forest just up the track from the trailer. She saw or

heard a Yellow Warbler, Gray Catbird, Common Grackle and our second Wood Thrush of the year, calling from Blind Creek, behind her. Later she visited the Hole (entrance to Blind Creek Forest), heard a Great Crested Flycatcher, and watched a beautiful Baltimore Oriole fly across the Lower Meadow to the Gallery Forest by the trailer.

The Raccoons that have been showing up around 7 pm in recent weeks, did not appear around the camp until nearly 9 pm. The first two appeared to be the nearly full grown kits of Betty -- but no Betty. Two more kits showed up at 9:40, along with a new adult "auslander". By 10 pm all six kits remaining last week had shown up again, but no mothers appeared until after midnight, when Celia showed up with the smaller of her two kits tagging along. Where are Amy and Betty? Once they had eaten a bit, kits went looking for their mothers, their plaintive burbles filling the night.

The fireflies have been nothing to write home about this year. One would wink somewhere in the Lower Meadow every minute or so, whereas in some years past the Lower Meadow would resemble a silent fireworks display. The nearly full moon frosted the meadow, even as the overnight low of 17° C kept it above the dew point. A Southern Flying Squirrel showed up at the bird seed tray on the Hickory several times and at 3 am the local Coyotes held a brief choir practice. Then all was silent again. No owls called.

Morning brought Nina Hurdle down to the trailer to pick up Pat in her van. The two planned to drive around the Skunks' Misery area to see what butterflies they could find. On her return, Pat asked Nina to let her off at the gate so she could walk in on her own. On the way, she found the lower limb of a fawn, on the track, presumably predated.

Shortly after 1:00 pm, the butterfly people showed up following a hot morning at Skunks' Misery, across the river. Hugh Casbourn and Betsy Baldwin edit *The Cardinal*, a quarterly publication of Nature London, one of Canada's oldest nature clubs. Their son Garth, a biology grad student at the University of Guelph, accompanied them. His lightning swoops with the net would prove decisive in the coming adventures. Andrea Currie, the fourth member of the party, is a butterfly novice, eager to learn more. Of course, these were just a fraction of the people who had been in Skunks' all morning.

The finds started almost as soon as we got into the Blind Creek Forest. With Betsy recording, Hugh spotting, and Garth netting, our first interesting finds were a

Silver Checkerspot and an American Snout butterfly on Edgar's Trail. Out on the river, Hugh spotted a Tawny Emperor on Mussel Beach, certain enough of the ID that Garth did not have to collect it. Betsy and Hugh, who have recently been running excerpts from the *Newport Bulletin* in *The Cardinal* were enjoying their first visit to Newport Forest. The walk along the 1.64 km circuit of the Thames River Trail amounted to a cook's tour of the place. Hugh spotted a Hackberry Emperor (on a Hackberry, no less) and up on the Hogsback, a flashy red bird diverted us from butterflies. We had to see it twice before we could be sure. A Scarlet Tanager, only the second record for this bird in 12 years on site!

Emerging into the supernatural heat of the Lower Meadow, Hugh spotted a Little Yellow. Garth made to swoop on it but the rarity flew off into Harvey's Bean-field. "I'm sure of it," said Hugh. At the Nook we enjoyed Pat's cake and drank lemonade before Andrea had to take her leave. Hugh and Betsy left for the Upper Meadow after that, stopping near a large patch of thistles where they found a Common Buckeye, a Painted Lady, and a Northern Broken Dash, among others.

The annual Skunks' Misery Butterfly Census is not so much about species but abundances. How many times was each species seen? Ann White, Director of the event, sent us a brief summary of counts in a message. (See below.)

Reeling in the 35° C heat, Pat and I slowly loaded the van. Just before departing, I set up a spare trail cam inside the trailer, attaching it to the back of a chair and aiming it at the floor, where mice (and weasels) like to scamper. Leaving at the gate, we spotted an Eastern Bluebird flying across the road.

Butterflies: (21)

American Snout (ET); Cabbage White (RSF); Clouded Sulphur (UM); Common Buckeye (UM); Common Wood Nymph (LM); European Skipper (Tr); Giant Swallowtail (RSF); Great Spangled Fritillary (RSF); Hackberry Emperor (RSF); **Little Yellow** (HBF); Little Wood Satyr (LM); Monarch (LM); Northern Broken Dash Skipper (BCF); Northern Crescent (HB); Northern Pearly-eye (ET); Orange Sulphur (UM); Painted Lady (UM); Red Admiral (Tr); Silvery Checkerspot (ET); Tawny Emperor (MB); Tiger Swallowtail (GF/W)

Birds: (27)

American Crow (EW); American Goldfinch (UM); American Robin (GF); Baltimore Oriole (GF); Barn Swallow (Rd); Black-capped Chickadee (HB); Blue

Jay (GF); Common Grackle (Sn); Common Yellowthroat (LM); **Eastern Bluebird** (Rd); Eastern Kingbird (UM); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Field Sparrow (LM); Gray Catbird (GF/E); Great Blue Heron (EW); Great Crested Flycatcher (Ho); Indigo Bunting (BW); Mourning Dove (Nk); Northern Cardinal (GF); Northern Flicker (GF/E); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF/E); **Scarlet Tanager** (HB); Song Sparrow (HBF); Tree Swallow (Rd); White-breasted Nuthatch (Nk); Wood Thrush (Sn); Yellow Warbler (Sn)

Phenology: Mosquitoes more abundant but still not bothersome, Deer Flies biting

Trail Cam Log: (a = am, p = pm, n = night, d = day, * = kits present)

Cam #1: Virginia Deer Je29 a/n (1doe)

Cam #2: Raccoon Je28 a/n (1), Virginia Deer (fwn) p/d Je24

Cam #3: Eastern Gray Squirrel Je22 a/d (1) (1) Je24 p/d (1), Raccoon Je21 p/n (1*) Je22 p/d (1) Je24 p/d (1*) [Cam #3 now moved to creek]

Precipitation report:

The year 2012 is now half over and this is an appropriate time to announce precipitation to date: 268 mm. Doubling this yields an estimate of 536 mm (\pm s.e.) for the entire year, barely half the regional average of 973 mm! Drought level has been set nominally at 700 mm. If the same pattern of precipitation continues, the area is headed for a major problem!

Readers Write:

Ann White directs the annual Skunks' Misery Butterfly census on behalf of Nature London.

“Just to let you know, we ended the day with a nice 53 species. Afternoon highlights included Baltimores, Spicebush Swallowtail, Snout, Silvery Checkerspot and Little Yellow. We had no Ringlets or Redspotted Purples but staggering numbers of Broken Dash (649), and Dun (362) Skippers. Little Wood Satyrs came to 183, which doesn't sound enough for us to be top this year.

“Thanks to all the counters who came out in the heat to help, and to those who brought great food to augment our hamburgers. The meal gets better every year.”

IMAGES:



This Silvery Checkerspot, captured along the trail to the river, has seen better days. To get some idea of how easy it is to make mistakes, compare this image with those of Crescent spp.

Top Finds



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The American Snout (upper image) and Little Yellow (lower) are both uncommon butterflies. The Snout (when seen) is easy to ID, owing to its elongated labial palps (the “snout”), but the Little Yellow can easily be mistaken for a small Sulphur. The Snout is seen annually at Newport, the Little Yellow only once before. Some 55 species of butterflies currently inhabit our ATBI list, not to mention 109 moth species!