

Weather: prec. 5 mm; RH 50%; BP 102.0 kPa; sn/cld; N 5 kmh; T 30° C

Activity: trail maintenance with Kee and Steve Logan

Time: 1:55 - 7:40 pm

Last wednesday I dropped in at Newport Forest in the early evening on my way back from Moraviantown, where I had an interesting visit with Darren Jacobs and his regeneration project on the Rez. I only stayed at Newport Forest for an hour, just to change the trail cam cards and to check on a few things. Just before leaving I spotted Pat's favorite Eastern Cottontail. (She calls it "Peter".) It didn't seem to mind me approaching it closely to take this image through the steamy atmosphere.



One Raccoon showed up. It was not well fed, so I threw it the rest of the nachos remaining from my dinner with Darren in Thamesville. It resembled Amy, one of our two missing mothers. Could it be one of her two kits?

Today Steve's truck rolled in driven by his wife, Karen. She would need it to run errands. We set out for the river, cutting parts that were previously missed. Our first target was the trail from the landing down to Mussel Beach. While Steve mowed out a beautiful walkable path, I visited what was left of the lagoon pools at the far end of the beach. Algal growths with an unusual shade of green hinted at a new species or two. I made a note to bring some sample jars on the next visit. I also photographed some intriguing small grey grasshoppers (not Pygmy Locusts) that turned out to be unidentifiable as adults. Perhaps they were late instars.

Proceeding on to our next target, deep in the Riverside Forest, we followed the main trail along the river bluffs, only to find our way blocked by a tree that had been deliberately felled across the trail, or so it seemed. We examined the stump. It was not made by a chain-saw, but by a beaver! As we struggled to get the tree (Cottonwood, 4" dbh) off the trail, I couldn't help wondering if Cougars ever eat beavers. Coyotes? Weasels? Anyone?

The trail to the Sandbar branches off the main trail inside the Riverside Forest. It was so badly overgrown, I struggled to follow it, pursued relentlessly by the whine of the weed-eater behind me. When we got to the Sandbar proper, we found that last year's thick and extensive stand of Stinging Nettle has been replaced almost entirely by this year's more extensive stand of Giant Ragweed, towering high over our heads, some with inch-thick stems! It was like a forest.

Defeated, we left things there and walked back to camp, cleaning the trail along the way. I drove Steve home, then returned to the property. Relaxing in the Nook, I was visited by another of those strange-looking "swamp coons", with very dark fur. In the shade they seem to be all black, except for white eyebrows, eartips and muzzle. I changed the SD cards on the (Four) trail cams now in operation and rode off into the sunset, more or less.

Birds: (12) (from Wednesday, July 4)

Baltimore Oriole* (LM); Blue Jay (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Field Sparrow (LM); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Northern Flicker (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (Tr); Song Sparrow (HBF); Tree Swallow (Rd/UM); Wild Turkey (UM)

* a male/female pair

Readers Write:

Pablo Jaramillo, a former grad student at Western, now directs a project to restore Monarch butterfly habitat in Mexico:

“Thank you for sending those updates, I always enjoy reading them . . . I have started the reforestation project for this year and things are looking very good. I am very excited because I was invited to a conference in Minnesota for experts on the Monarch Butterfly. The meeting was a success and I was able to show my work for 2011. Un abrazo a la distancia mi querido amigo . . .”

Chris Dewdney, brother and poet/naturalist, describes a strange diet in Toronto:

“The cucumber magnolia in my yard hosts a [Tiger Swallowtail] caterpillar. Lovely little creature that I discovered after two weeks of picking up single green leaves whose tips had been scalloped by what I [thought] were leaf-cutter bees. The strange thing was that each leaf had been severed at the base of the petiole. I picked these up, sometimes one, more recently two at a time, on the lawn beneath the tree. Then I found the caterpillar and realized that after consuming part of the leaf, it then proceeded to the base and trimmed the leaf off.” (He wonders if this prevents predators from finding it by destroying the evidence of its presence.)

Dave Martin, local bird expert, on the mystery swallow and our Scarlet Tanager:

“From your description and photo, the most likely swallow would be Northern Rough-winged Swallow so you can change that phrase in your report from ‘possible’ to ‘probable’.” [in a later message] “Seeing a Scarlet Tanager anywhere is a great find although they're not uncommon in big woods. We hear about 10 for every one we see, except for the first few days when they come back in spring.”

Someone in England sent us this tip-off to “murmurations” of Starlings. The birds may not be much loved here, but across the water they may have a different status. At times they gather in huge swarms (millions?) to form a cloud that takes on a life of its own, streaming like a vast amoeba, then dividing. If you decide to watch the video linked to below, please be sure to have your seat-belt fastened.

<http://vimeo.com/31158841> (about ten minutes)

IMAGES:



Readers get only three guesses at which creature cut down this young Cottonwood! Our first record of a Beaver on the property dates to December 28 last, when Darren Jacobs spotted one near the mouth of Fleming Creek. We had already known they were in the area, as witness a beaver dam on the creek several hundred metres upstream from Newport Forest proper. It first appeared in 2010.

The bark had been stripped from the tree for a good metre up from the cut. Beavers eat the bark of poplars and related species. In other words, this had been but one meal!



I took this picture standing (5' 9") while holding the camera over my head and pointing it at the tops of Giant Ragweed that surrounded us at the Sandbar. The stand seemed endless and defeated us utterly. The river is about 30 m (somewhere) to the left.

Just for now, the trail ends here.