

Time: 1:20 - 6:45 pm

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 69%; BP 101.3 kPa; cloud/sun, N 5 - 15 kmh; T 28° C

Activity: Kee hosts Dan Bickel for a return visit

It has been two years since Dan Bickel's last visit to Newport Forest. This former resident of Detroit whom I met as an undergraduate at the U of Michigan (I taught him calculus) is now curator of Entomology at the Australian National Museum. Consequently, he only comes to North America once or twice a year.

We went to the beach first, where Dan explored the Newport Forest of paleozoic times, once tropical and close to the equator. He found a "thunderstone" which



had split open to reveal an interior bejeweled with tiny crystals of pyrite. These concretions of iron sulphide formed in a shallow inland sea during the Devonian Age. They are often associated with shale formations and apparently originate in a

limestone/shale shelf within the bluffs and hidden by the overburden of soil slowly wasting down the slope. Dan, who used to collect fossils as a kid, was also fascinated by our Devonian-age rocks, laden with bryozons, brachiopods, crinoids, and (sooner or later) trilobites. About 350 million years ago, Newport Forest was at the bottom of a shallow sea! I pointed out the approximate level of the shelf of shale and limestone about 5 metres above the beach -- the former "sea level"

We visited the "Euglena lagoon", finding new growths of filamentous algae at the bottom. I took a sample for later examination. We saw several greyish grasshoppers which I assumed were the adult forms (Seaside Locust) of nymphs spotted a few weeks ago. Dan remarked, as we left the beach that you could teach a whole session on riverine habitat and ecology right there!

Back on the main trail, we threaded our way to the top of the bluffs, only to be confronted by a newly felled tree. Oh no! Not beavers again! (See below.) Dan also pointed out widening cracks running along part of the bluffs trail. Sometime in the not-too-distant future, this part of the trail will give away, as a massive new hummock begins its journey, edging downslope to the river. Further on, we flushed a large game bird, which I failed to notice quickly enough to tell what it was. I thought it might be a Ruffed Grouse.

By the time we got into the Riverside Forest, the sky had cleared completely and winds continued to gust from the north, stirring the trees overhead into frantic arm-waving. Along the trail Dan spotted a cicada shell, the cast off nymphal case of an adult that would sing on calmer days. As a result of the wind, there were so few birds calling or showing themselves, that I decided not to keep a list for the visit. Contrariwise, there were butterflies everywhere in the woods, from Red Admirals to Giant Swallowtails.

Starting almost from the beginning of our walk in the woods, we encountered spider web after spider web, ducking whenever possible and, when not, destroying hours of work. And they were all the same species, the Spined Micrathena, an oddly shaped orb weaver. Noting the large number of these webs, I began to count them as encountered. Thanks to the recent rain, we also came upon numerous fungi, stopping to photograph a few. Dan remarked at one point that had he not chosen to be an entomologist, he would have studied fungi, instead.

We rested a while on the Hogsback bench before continuing on. I drew a mental sketch of the former human inhabitants of this place. As we descended into the Blind Creek Forest, I listed the advantages of a village there: 1. constant supply of

fresh water flowing through town (Blind Creek), 2. shelter from northerly winds during the winter months (The Hogsback), 3. plentiful fish from the river, 4. lots of game in the area. Food and shelter. what more do you want? Some day, with permission of the Thames Talbot Land Trust, we will bring in a local archaeologist or two for site assessment. (Years ago we had already found a musket ball under the soil with our metal detector. It was identified by a firearms expert as a 50-calibre ball, probably from a Brown Bess musket.)

Coming out of the trail at last, I wrote down our final count of Micrathena webs: 54. Definitely a record. “This place has changed”, remarked Dan on our way back to the Nook. Sometimes the infrequent visitor sees more than the regular one, as when children seem to shoot up. “How so?” He pointed out that the trees in the Regen Zone were *much* larger now, for one thing. Indeed, they are.

Later we went down to the creek to change the sd cards in the trail cam by the rapids. Dan marveled at a site by the river that had a creek running through it, as well. We closed up camp and left for dinner, then Dan’s departure for Detroit.

Leps: (8)

Cabbage White (ET); Giant Swallowtail (ET); Hackberry Emperor (MB); Monarch (TR); Northern Crescent (? MB); Red Admiral (RL); Silver-spotted Skipper (LM); Tiger Swallowtail (ET)

New Species: (ID materials available)

‘Lagoon Spirogyra’ *Spirogyra [orientalis]* MB KD J124/12

Phenology: mosquitoes almost absent, Honeybees out, Cicadas out, Micrathena population boom, Sweet Jo-pye Weed in bloom

ATBI Report: current counts for the five kingdoms included in the survey are:

Plants	480	
Animals	924	
Fungi & Lichens	224	
Protists	184	
Eubacteria	22	Total: 1,834

IMAGES:



Once again we confront new damage by our resident beaver(s) and once again this ill-intentioned rodent has succeeded in blocking the trail. This time it took down a larger poplar that had died over a year ago. We conclude that beavers eat the bark of dead poplars, as well as live ones. At Newport Forest we learn something new every visit.

We welcome suggestions from readers about what to do about these animals. Trap and relocate them? Is the effort worth it? How bad is the “damage” likely to get?



Giant Swallowtail samples flowers of Sweet Jo-pye Weed. These butterflies are very common at Newport Forest, thanks to many Prickly Ash growing in various places throughout the site. We also have a thriving Hop Tree, another favorite of the larvae.