

Ap18/13

## Newport Forest Bulletin

Monitoring Nature

# 873

**Date & Time:** Thursday April 18 2013 2:30 - 6:40 pm

**Weather:** Pr 12 mm; RH 68%; BP 100.8 kPa; SSE 5-40 kmh; cld/sun; T 27°C

**Activity:** Limited by rain, we work the trails & skip the salamanders

In contrast to recent “spring” weather, today’s temperature soared to the high 20s, fueled by warm winds from the southern US -- all part of yet another massive low crossing the area. We drove only as far as the Upper Meadow, parked on the Rise, and pulled our supplies down to the trailer on a plastic sledge.



Near the end of our stay another straggling system loomed to the SW, bringing with it a light drizzle that brought our visit to an end. Note the complete absence of bud-break as the winter landscape continues.

As soon as we got to the trailer door, I spotted a jumping spider on the knob. A close examination revealed *Metaphidippus* sp, first identified in August of 2010. We currently have six species of Salticid (jumping) Spiders on the ATBI list.

Pat, recently inspired by the Marshall books (tomes, actually), was everywhere with her camera, examining everything from ants on mounds to flies and wasps on the trailer windows. She delighted in a Green Tiger Beetle by the trailer. We were suddenly interrupted by a bird with a call like trickling water. The Brown-headed Cowbird was back -- with its mate. Nearby some White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos pecked away at old seed, still waiting to go north. Many birds were out today, despite the frequent high winds. A lone Eastern Gray squirrel foraged in the Fleming Creek Forest. Had it taken refuge in a tree during the entire flood or had it fled to higher ground?

It was time to assess the aftermath of last week's flood. I would have to walk all 1.5 km of the Thames River Trail, making notes along the way. What I call "hanging water" remains in depressions after a flood at a level that is much higher than the river after the flood has subsided. The vernal ponds were still filled with hanging water but the trail was walkable again, although soggy in places.

The river was now only about 1.5 m higher than normal, the creek perhaps half a metre. As I made my way up the bluffs from the Landing, I noticed several patches of Wild Leeks (at a quick guess) with leaves already out, but no flowers in evidence. Further along in the Riverside Forest, I discovered several more patches in Bluebell Woods. Speaking of which, the Virginia Bluebell leaves are now half emerged, still with a darkish purple hue. Neither up to this point in my circuit of the property, nor further on, did I see a single spring ephemeral in bloom.

I hung a right at the trail to the sandbar in order to mark it with surveyors flags for the guidance of Sunday's trail crew. I followed the Sandbar Trail to the end to search for a strange tree I had seen on our last visit there. It had reminded me of what they call a "trail marker" tree, grown into a special shape by the Indians\* that used to live here. I also spotted many more clumps of Virginia Bluebells growing in the area. Carrying out a brief survey to the east (upstream) I discovered to my delight that the whole inland shoreline, from Bluebell Woods right down to the Sandbar was covered with Virginia Bluebells, totaling approximately 3-4 ha of sandy soil in which these are the dominant plants.

I climbed the Hogsback along the trail, placing two marker flags in front of a bench with broken legs, then continued on to the bench on top at the 1000-metre mark. Here I took a brief rest, noting that the intervals of warm sunshine were becoming shorter and shorter. The western sky appeared a uniform grey. I got up, continuing along the trail and down the switchback on the other side. The downward trail was soggy with seeps and here the walking pole came in handy.

Passing through the Blind Creek Forest, I counted 6-7 Western Chorus Frogs calling in three separate ponds, as well as two Wood Frogs. All this time the sky to the west had been getting ominously dark. I had just spotted a Red Squirrel running along a log by the trail when the walkie-talkie rang in my pocket. "That sky looks pretty dark. I think it's going to rain." I double-timed back to the Lower Meadow where Pat waited by the trailer. This was a pity as I had been looking forward to searching under logs to give my salaams to the salamanders. As I went, I reviewed the equipment that would be needed by Sunday's trail crew: rake, hoe, chain saw, mallet, lumber, and prefab bench parts. I decided we should probably issue an advisory containing simple directions to Jane, Erin and others

We got about halfway through supper when we heard rain begin to patter on the trailer deck. "We're outa here." I declared. I was nervous about escaping from the property before it got too wet again. We packed up the sled and dragged both it and ourselves back to the van in the Upper Meadow. We made it out, but the van was now covered with chocolate icing.

\*To please Whites some Indians might label themselves as "Aboriginals" or "Natives", but they are still "Indians" among themselves, in my experience. (See Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian* for enlightenment on the subject.)

### **Birds:** (17)

American Crow (LM/BCF); American Robin (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF)/Tr; Common Grackle (UM); Dark-eyed Junco (GF/Nk); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Field Sparrow (LM); Kinglet\* (FCT); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF/W); Red-bellied Woodpecker (RSF); Song Sparrow (LM); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); White-throated Sparrow (HBF);

**Phenology:** no significant bud-break yet, Brown-headed Cowbirds back, White-throated Sparrows and Juncos still hanging around.

**REMINDER:** (for local readers) The Thames Talbot Spring Volunteer Work Day will be held this Sunday, starting at 1 pm and continuing on until 5 pm. Please park off-road at 22139 Fleming Line. Be sure to bring a pair of work gloves. If you don't have any, a limited supply will be available. Dress for cool weather.

### **IMAGES:**



Trout Lilies on the sunny side of the creek bluffs are a little ahead of the others, with flower buds about to open. Checking our phenology records for herbaceous plants, we were surprised to discover that the spring ephemeral season is not that late at all, at least not yet. The unseasonable weather has put us off our game, so to speak.





Is this a trail-marker tree? If it is, it's not a great example. Such trees were traditionally altered by Indians until as late as the 19th Century to point directions along a trail or off it. They would locate a suitable sapling near the trail and bend its top over in the direction to be indicated. Then they would then secure the top to an anchor-point on the ground, letting it grow into the new shape; a single lateral branch would become the new terminal branch. In this case a second lateral branch appears to have sprouted from the main trunk much later in the tree's life. This putative marker tree points downriver. The trail crew will spot it easily once they get to the Sand Bar.

For more information see: <http://www.greatlakestrailtreesociety.org/>