

Date and Time: Sunday April 21 2013 1:00 - 6:45 pm

Weather: Pr 4 mm; RH 53%; BP 104.0 kPa; sun/haze; calm; T 10° C

Activity: Thames Talbot Work Day

Some 15 vehicles lined the side of the road at the Entrance to Newport Forest while volunteers filed in and Donald Craig ran a shuttle service between the gate and the Lower Meadow in his ATV. Some 23 volunteers showed up, some deciding to work at taking out the old tree station while the rest, ably led by Jane Bowles and Erin Carroll, went down to the Lower Meadow for trail work in the



Work Days are all about enjoying a good outing. Here Johanna (left) and Magdalena Nicolai (right) look out the windows of their invisible home while little brother Emil snoozes in his stroller behind them.

woods. They simply followed the main (Thames River) trail, doing what needed to be done. Most of the volunteers worked on lining the trail and bridging wet

areas with corduroys of sticks and branches. Donald Craig and Andre LaChance ran their chain saws to clear heavy logs from the trail. Mhairi MacFarlane took advantage of Andre's chain saw to get rid of a giant Autumn Olive on the river bluffs. Licensed to administer Roundup in a conservation context, Mhairi did just that; we look forward to a decline in this invasive tree in years to come. Returning from a successful search for the Harbinger of Spring with Marg Hulls, Pat Dewdney served drinks and cookies to the volunteers relaxing in the Nook.

I decided to see how the work was going by walking the trail circuit in clockwise fashion, rather than the traditional direction. That way I would encounter everybody. First I ran into Donald Craig and Ann White clearing the Blind Creek portion of the Trail by chain saw and hand. It must be remarked that we are still dealing with the Great Bitternut dieback of 2005-07 caused by a combination of drought and borers. The last of the vertical corpses are now crashing to earth.

As I clambered up the Hogsback, I wondered why it felt strange to be taking the trail in this direction. Obviously it felt strange because we so rarely do so. But might it be the case that in the northern hemisphere we tend to follow circuits in a counterclockwise direction while in the southern hemisphere the opposite tendency prevails -- like water down a drain or cyclonic weather? The forest engenders strange thoughts.

I arrived at the Hogsback rest bench at the same time as Andre LaChance and Ron Martin from the opposite direction. We debated whether to replace our national symbol, a destructive rodent, with the raccoon. I thought it would look quite handsome on a coat of arms. But Andre dislikes raccoons. More strange thoughts.

Coming off the Hogsback, I next ran into Erin Carroll, a meeting marked by the sudden appearance of a Black-throated Green Warbler, perhaps migrating through. The Nicolai family was next, with two daughters and infant son in a stroller. Father Christoff managed the stroller (too wide for the trail) while mother Annegret, a recent addition to the UWO Biology Department, showed me the snails she had collected to this point. She specializes in gastropods. Was there anyone behind them? Hmm. The remaining volunteers must have exited by the way they came in. Since the Nicolais were new to Newport Forest, I also decided to change direction to show them along. Or perhaps I had finally succumbed to the coriolis force.

I showed them the ever-growing sandbar, emerging Bluebells and other plants, and a Mourning Cloak butterfly. We made our way through the ecotone into the Beech-maple Forest and on up the Hogsback, then down the other side. In the

Blind Creek Forest, we met with Marg Hulls and Donald Craig. Marg took us up to see the Harbinger of Spring (See IMAGES.) and Donald showed us several more young Rock Elms he had found in the same area. Marg told us of seeing a Spring Beauty in bloom earlier. Having realized that the remaining volunteers must by now be back at the trailer, I abandoned the Nicolais to scurry back. There I met Steward Bruce Parker, and volunteers Gordon Price with sister Susan. Pat explained that Jane Bowles and the other volunteers had already left the property.

The tree station operation had apparently been a complete success, with scrap materials now added to the ever-growing pile at the gate. When the Nicolais finally emerged from the Hole-in-the-Wall, their kids cleaned up the remaining cookies. Erin was there, mentioning excitedly that she had finally seen a Fairy Shrimp in one of the vernal ponds today. This species is endemic to the Blind Creek area, sometimes showing up in large numbers under late winter ice.

Finally, when everyone else had left, Pat and I complained to each other about exhaustion and aching legs. We broke camp and hobbled on up to the road.

Birds: (23)

American Crow (GF); American Kestrel (PL); American Robin (SB); Black-capped Chickadee (GF/Tr); Black-throated Green Warbler (HB/N); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF/Tr); Common Flicker (GF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Hairy Woodpecker (RSF); Killdeer (HP); Kinglet* (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Pileated Woodpecker (RSF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (ET); Red-winged Blackbird (ER); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (FCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); White-throated Sparrow (GF); Wild Turkey (BCF/HB) *no ID to sp.

New Species: (found by Annegret Nicolai)

‘Eastern Haplotrema’	<i>Haplotrema concavum</i>	NF AN Ap21/13
‘Bigmouth Ambersnail’	<i>Novisuccinea ovalis</i>	NF AN Ap21/13
‘Small Ambersnail’	<i>Succinea putris</i>	NF AN Ap21/13
Dished Threetooth	<i>Triodopsis vulgata</i>	NF AN Ap21/13

Phenology: Harbinger of Spring and Spring Beauty now in bloom; first Mourning Cloak butterfly; Fairy Shrimp in BCF; returned birds listed separately

IMAGES:



Marg Hulls and Pat Dewdney found these diminutive Harbinger of Spring plants on the south side of the Hogsback near the top, where they usually grow. This plant is rated S3 in the NHIC list, qualifying it as rare to-uncommon. As you might suspect from the leaves of this plant, it belongs to the Parsley family. (loony coin and Trout Lily leaves are also in image)



Adding splashes of colour to the awakening forest were this Scarlet Cup fungus (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*) growing beside the trail on the Hogsback. The Nicolai sisters actually discovered the cups!