

Date and time: Thursday September 19 2013 2:20 -8:45 pm

Weather: Pr 0mm; RH 72%; BP 101.9 kPa; S 5-10 kmh; ovcst; T 24° C

Activity: Monitoring wildlife

It was a strange day, with sunny skies that became heavily overcast by the time I arrived on site. At the “base camp”, I noticed that the old Black Maple that shades the Nook has already started to turn colour, although other trees remain green.



Having decided on one last fling at meadow insects, I had hardly gotten started when my Lumix camera conked out, reminding me that I had forgotten to charge the battery. That put paid to arthropod adventures, except for earlier images of a Bumblebee (*Bombus impatiens*) in the field and a Robber Fly (*Machimus* sp.) on the trailer door. I decided to change gears and simply list all the species of wildlife (with a certain megafaunal bias) that I could see.

On my way to the river, I felt a few tiny drops of rain, but these quickly petered

out. Mussel Beach had emerged from high water and was walkable once again. As soon as I broke cover from the trail, a pair of Wood Ducks took off downriver, making their “weep-weep-weep” call. Walking the beach, I soon came to a peculiar game trail, consisting of hundreds of Raccoon prints connecting the river bluffs to the shore of the beach. Presumably, this is their drinking trail, so to speak. Intersecting the trail were the tracks of a lone deer, following the water's edge. These tracks led me to a pair of mussel valves which I bagged for later inspection. I wrote “mucket?” in my notebook. Beyond that were dozens of Great Blue Heron prints. A Spotted Sandpiper flew in as I left.

Returning to the Landing, I took the trail up to the bluffs where I sat to watch the river. A large fish jumped by the bend upstream, but that was it. Insects and other arthropods seemed scarce, perhaps expecting rain and hiding under leaves. The bushes lining the trail by the Landing seemed alive with warblers. I have never learned my warblers except for a few common ones, leaving that to the experts.

By 4:30 I was back in camp. The air was now dead calm and very humid. The trailer deck hosted a convention of hoverflies. The patterns on their abdomens seemed to be all the same. A few species of *Syrphus* and *Dasysyrphus* share this particular pattern. One landed on my arm and became very affectionate with my sweat glands. It just wouldn't leave!

What would a walk up to the Copse (highest point of the Gallery Forest) reveal? The answer came before I got halfway there. I flushed what I first thought was a Bobolink from the edge of the road. A white flash was very visible as the bird flew off. Problem: the Bobolink has a white rump only during the breeding season, so it couldn't have been a Bobolink. Dark-eyed Junco? Too early. A visit to the Cornell Bird Lab (with help from Pat) brought the answer. The Common Flicker has a white rump and often goes to ground to search for insects. The Copse held little interest, so I walked back to the trailer, flushing a Brown Snake in the process.

The Gallery Forest seemed full of Eastern Gray Squirrels (black phase). They spent most of their time harvesting nuts from the Shagbark Hickories by the trailer. All afternoon, a constant patter of falling nuts or discarded rinds pattered to the ground and rained on the trailer roof. They harvest the nuts by biting them from their stems. If they fall, no problem, they'll get them later. They spend most of their time upstairs holding the nuts between their paws and chewing off the rind, presumably to get through the hard shell. Meanwhile a rather athletic Red Squirrel leapt from one tree top to another, then down to the bird tray for seed. In

the distance some Striped Chipmunks made their “pock pock” calls.

By sunset the air temperature had dropped to 19° C and the orthopteran chorus began: tree, bush and meadow crickets started up, complemented by one or two species of katydid. I set up the recorder in case the mystery bird over in Eva’s Woods (slightly off the property) started calling. I stayed until nearly nine pm, with no result. On the way out I nearly ran over an Eastern Cottontail, the one that Pat sometimes calls “Peter”. There’s no problem recognizing Peter. In the Beatrix Potter School of Ecology, they’re all called Peter.

Birds:(11)

American Crow (UM); American Robin (LM); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (GF); Common Grackle (GF/FC); Great Blue Heron (MB); Northern Cardinal (LM/HBF); Red Bellied Woodpecker (GF); Spotted Sandpiper (TR); Wood Duck

Phenology: First tree turning colour (Black Maple); second week of Hickory nutfall and squirrel harvesting

Cougar Report: We are still waiting for a chance to interview Ms Martin about her cougar sighting on Hwy #2.

Nature in Ontario’s Banana Belt: Be sure to visit Erin Carroll’s wonderful nature site, this week featuring the discovery of a Royal River Cruiser (dragonfly) near Petrolia. She has also posted the most frustrating “Find the X” puzzle I have ever encountered. The Green Darner (= X) is there, alright. I just couldn’t find the darned thing. Back-blogs include images from Newport Forest.

Visit <http://erintown.blogspot.ca/>

Boston Harbor Islands ATBI project is operated by the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology: “The primary objectives of this first phase of the ATBI are to: (1) catalog the arthropod fauna across the Boston Harbor Islands national park; (2) engage, educate, and excite the public about biodiversity through outreach and educational activities; and (3) use biodiversity data to inform park management.” The project is professionally managed and represents the kind of collaboration toward which we hope to steer the Newport Forest ATBI project.

Visit: <http://www.nps.gov/boha/naturescience/atbi.htm>

IMAGES:



The Pocket-Book (*Lampsilis cardium*) is common in southern Ontario and also occurs in the Ohio/Mississippi drainages. This specimen is worn, but distinguishable from other freshwater species by its heavy, somewhat triangular “pseudocardinal” teeth (visible in the upper right part of the lower valve), the heavy and elongated hinge teeth and swollen “umbo” that encloses a deep pocket at the top of each valve. Older members of the species share a number of diagnostic features with the Mucket Clam and have a completely different profile from younger members!

We don't call it “Mussel Beach” for nothing.



A four-point buck samples the veg by day while a doe comes out at night. Both animals were using a game trail that joins the river trail right in the game camera's field of view. The fall "rut" is about to start, but so is the deer-hunting season. Is the hunt held in the fall for the sake of trophies?

