

Date and time: Thursday April 10 2014 1:50 - 5:10 pm

Weather: Pr 10mm; RH 61%; BP 100.8 kPa; haze/sun; SSW 40-60 kmh, T 18° C

Activity: Looking for spring ephemerals, bud-break and other signs of spring.

As I arrived at the property gate, a Groundhog bounded across the road ahead of me, as if fleeing Fleming Creek. Had its burrow been drowned out by the flood?

Stepping out of the van at the gate, I realized that today had not been a great idea. Wind whipped last year's meadow plants into a frenzy and the distant power lines across the meadow moaned, as if in fear. Driving gingerly down to the trailer, I found the velocimeter (a crude affair) indicating winds that varied between 30 and 60 km/h, sometimes gusting up to 80, all under a gloomy grey haze. "There goes the bird list," I thought, but brightened at the prospect of spring ephemerals.



Bloodroot is among the early spring ephemerals to appear at Newport Forest

A glance down the bluffs behind the trailer revealed that Fleming Creek was still in a massive flood, inundating Fleming Creek Forest. Since this was all backed up water from the river, the Thames was also at the same flood level as before.

I made a tour of the young tree test area near the trailer for bud break, noting that lower branches in about 90% of them had been deer-nipped, upper branches unmolested. No bud-break to speak of in any of them. Glancing around I could see that none of the early spring ephemerals usually to be found in the vicinity of the trailer had emerged yet, either. That too was a bit unusual. I scanned the surround-

ing forests: the Gallery Forest, Blind Creek Forest and Eva's Woods , just off property. No flush of any kind, not even yellow among the willows. So far everything looked like the property expected more winter. Ah well. Soon, then?

I had a new trail cam to install, as well as an sd card to collect from the previously installed Cam #1. As I entered the Blind Creek Forest through The Hole, the sound of Western Chorus Frogs cheered me up. Plenty of them. Then a distant rolling chirp that sounded like a Gray Tree Frog. I recorded it and later compared it to calls on the web. I couldn't hear any difference. What else could it be? I took the Thames River Trail to the Elbow where I installed the new trail camera as Cam #2.

Feeling energetic, I decided to walk the Blind Creek Trail instead of the River trail (both are sections of the 1.64 km Thames River Trail — a circuit). Following it to the base of the Hogsback, I passed several more vernal ponds, each with its own complement of Western Chorus Frogs. Along the way I noted several trees over the trail that would have to be cleared by volunteers during the annual Work Day this Sunday. As I continued the mission I constantly scanned both sides of the trail for any hint of new plants. Nothing. As if to console me, two newly emerged Mourning Cloak butterflies fluttered past, followed later by an Eastern Comma. Arriving at the foot of the Hogsback, I spotted a vernal pond nearby and went over to check it for frogs. Here were not only lots of Western Chorus Frogs, but several Wood Frogs croaking as well.

Back at the trailer I was shocked to see that it had been invaded by a small mammal through a window screen, either a squirrel or Tim the Weasel. More scat here and there, pots off the kitchen wall and books off a shelf. If this was to be the "hospitality suite" for volunteers this coming Sunday, I had better clean up. I did so, then headed for the van, being nearly blown off my feet on the way. Time to go. Back home Pat reminded me that If I had gone up the Hogsback, I might have at least found Harbinger of Spring, first of the ephemerals. Had I at least seen some Skunk Cabbage? No? Well, maybe the Riverside Forest would have been better.

Birds: (n/r) Birds mostly hunkered down from the wind.

Animals noted: Mammals: Groundhog, Eastern Gray Squirrel (visuals); Eastern Cottontail, Raccoon, Virginia Deer - pregnant doe, Wild Turkey (Trail Cam #1); Insects: Mourning Cloak, Eastern Comma; Frogs: Gray Tree Frog (?), Western Chorus Frog, Wood Frog.

IMAGES:



A graveyard of fallen Bitternut Hickories can be clearly seen on the slope of the Hogsback with the snow gone. These all died when a wrecking crew of Hickory Bark Borers came to finish off trees that were already weakened by a two-year dry spell in the early 2000s. Almost every visit to the property at that time would bring the disheartening crash of another tree going over. But hey, great for fungi!