

Date and time: Sunday May 25 2014 1:20 - 7:50 pm

Weather: Pr 17 mm; RH 37%; BP 102.3 kPa; sun/cloud; S 5 kmh; T 28° C

Activity: ATBI: spiders and earthworms plus trailer rehab

We had no sooner pulled into camp and settled into the Nook to rest, when the burbling sounds of baby raccoons could be heard in the nursery box attached to the old Black Maple that shades the nook. This box has hosted a mother raccoon almost every April since 2004. It has two floors, the upper one occupying the front half of the box. A smaller box to the left temporarily housed a squirrel on rehab a year or two later but has not been used since. A birdseed tray is mounted below the image.



Imagine our surprise, cleaning the trailer a little later, when we heard baby weasels whining inside one of the storage boxes under a window seat. So it's not "Tim the Weasel" after all, but "Wendy", to pick a name from the hat. What to do? Pat's instinct was to get rid of the lot. My instinct was to see what it would be like to live with a weasel family. After all, being nocturnal they'd be out most of the night during a sleepover. Later Pat looked up weasel litters. "I definitely heard at least three babies, but it says here that litters for the Long-tailed weasel can run to eight!" She also read how it might take six to eight weeks to raise them all. Should I check the web for artificial den projects? Not a box this time, but something more rustic — in the old log, perhaps. Are we heading toward Beatrix Potterville?

We had a simple schedule: clean the trailer, ATBI work, supper, more ATBI. But we had barely begun in the trailer when Pat found a medium-sized black spider hiding in a coverlet. I did not recognize it immediately as the Parson Spider (*Herpyllus ecclesiasticus*), a white parson's collar decorating its back. Not new.

There was weasel scat all over. We continued to clean, when Pat found a second spider hiding in a dish towel. This turned out to be new, a comb footed spider (see below) somewhat related to the Black Widow. Its venom, however, is hardly worse than a bee sting. It was then that Pat heard the baby weasels. I heard them too. We looked at each other as we re-thought the entire weasel situation.

It was time for me to go a-worming. I spent a happy hour or two in the Blind Creek Forest flipping logs by the vernal ponds. I collected (at a guess) some five species, from little red worms to bigger wrigglers like *Lumbricus* and the Woodland Blue Worm. I also renewed my acquaintance with local snails, but found nothing new.

Back in camp, I sat in the Nook with Pat, logging birds that came to the feeder and discussing the weasel situation. Pat felt up to a walk to the river. A slowly subsiding flood had left the clay beach still fully submerged, so we made our way to the river bluffs with its handy viewing bench. And there, right beside the bench, was the partially completed web of our next spider, a small orb-weaver. I spent the next 15 minutes trying to get good images, using a plastic ruler as a backdrop to aid focusing. At first I thought a double row of white spots were on the abdominal dorsum, but the spider was on the other side of the web and the spots decorated the venter or underside. These, along with size, morphology, web type and habitat, were our first clues to the spider's identity.

A few swallows flew back and forth across the river but we could not be sure that they were Northern Rough-winged Swallows. No Bald Eagles, no Canada Geese. On the way back to camp we passed a log at one end of which a large, white cushiony mass revealed the resting stage of a common slime mold with the appealing name of Dog Vomit Slime (*Fuligo septica*). Supper in the Nook and more trailer work prevented any further ATBI for the day.

Birds: (22)

American Crow (BCF); American Goldfinch (Rd); American Robin (BCF/LM); Baltimore Oriole (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF); Common Yellowthroat (LM/HBF); Great Blue Heron (UM); Great Crested Flycatcher (BCF); House Sparrow (Rd); Mourning Dove

(GF); Northern Cardinal (EW); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF/E); Song Sparrow (LM); Spotted Sandpiper (TR); Tree Swallow (UM); Tufted Titmouse (GF); Turkey Vulture (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wild Turkey (EW)

Phenology: first mosquitoes biting

Trail Cam Report:

Trail Cam 1: Raccoon Tues 4:15 am; Wild Turkey Thurs 6:17 pm; Raccoon Sat 10:39 pm; Raccoon Sun 3:29 am; Wild Turkey Sun 7:38 am
Trail Cam 2: no animal images. We may move this camera to the Nook!

New Species:

Boreal Combfoot*	<i>Steatoda [borealis]</i>	Tr pd/KD My25/14
Four-spotted Mangora	<i>Mangora acalypha</i>	RB KD My25/14
Black Head Worm	[<i>Apporectodea longa</i>]	VP KD My25/14

Species Notes: The first two common names are made up. There is nothing particularly “boreal” about the Combfoot (Theridiidae), since it occurs only in southern Canada. The square brackets indicate the possibility of another species of *Steatoda* (*S. grossa*) that cannot be ruled out just now. The “four-spotted” name for the Mangora spider refers to the first two pairs of white spots (in a double row) which are particularly prominent. This specimen exhausts the three common species of *Mangora* in our area, the other two being already recorded on site. The earthworm is tentatively identified as I start work on these invertebrates, initially with an oversimplified key; colour is a poor way to sort earthworms.

Special Report: Thames Talbot purchases the Bebensee Tract

The Thames Talbot Land Trust recently purchased a 26-ha block of land within the Skunk’s Misery forest across the river from Newport Forest. The centre of the newly purchased tract lies exactly two km due west of Newport’s Riverside Forest. A long strip of farmland bordered by Highway Two on one side and the river on the other separates the Bebensee tract from Newport Forest. It’s a start.

Of special interest to us is the vendor, Elaine Bebensee (pronounced Bee’bensee), who grew up in the area of a ghost town called Cashmere, about 2.5 km southwest of Newport Forest as the crow flies and lying within the same strip of bordering

farmland just mentioned. Cashmere began with an inn in 1825. Later developments included a controversial dam constructed across the river by the Gardiner brothers in 1841. There was a grist mill powered by the dam, a thriving fish industry and even a proposed steamboat navigation line between Cashmere and points upriver. However, the town fell on hard times and the dam was under constant threat from breakage and flooding. A continuing sale of bottom feeding fishes gave Cashmere its other name: Suckertown.

Further Reading: *Suckertown: Entrepreneurship and Urbanization in Early Ontario*, Guy St-Denis, London & Middlesex Historical Society, London, Ontario 1999.

IMAGES:



Woodland Blue Worm (*Octolasion cyaneum*) is “relatively rare” in North America, but we would add “locally common” to that assessment, especially in and around wetlands. Like many of our species, this one has an European origin. The previous ice age is said to have wiped out our previously native worm fauna.



Looking downriver: The Thames continues to run a metre high, with debris from recent floods piled in the foreground. A clay beach at the base of the bluffs on the left remains completely submerged. The dam at Suckertown, were it still in existence, would be four km downstream by water from this point.

CORRECTION TO REPORT:
should have read as follows:

Special Report: Thames Talbot Receives the Bebensee Tract

The Thames Talbot Land Trust recently received a 26-ha block of land within the Skunk's Misery forest across the river from Newport Forest. The centre of the newly purchased tract lies exactly two km due west of Newport's Riverside Forest. A long strip of farmland bordered by Highway Two on one side and the river on the other separates the Bebensee tract from Newport Forest. It's a start.

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Further Reading: Suckertown: Entrepreneurship and Urbanization in Early Ontario, Guy St-Denis, London & Middlesex Historical Society, London, Ontario 1999.

In short, Elaine Bebensee was a donor NOT a vendor!

With many apologies,