

Date and time: Saturday-Sunday July 05 - 06 2014

Weather: Pr 17mm; RH 37%; BP 102.6 kPa; sun/haze; SW 5-15 kmh; T 27° C

Activity: An overnight stay, more ATBI, and the Annual Butterfly Count

It took more than an hour to set up the trailer for an overnight stay. This involved not only a cleanup, but removing the last leavings of the “guest” weasel, including the leg of a predated rabbit in the weasel’s food cache. By late afternoon, we were ready for a walk to the river. Along the trail, we immediately noticed stands of newly opened Michigan Lilies dotting the rich woods landscape. At the river itself,



water levels were nearly back to normal, the clay shelf we call Mussel Beach now barely accessible along the lower river bluffs. Lagoons had opened to the river, discharging their fry into the muddy runoff.

Back in the Lower Meadow, we searched for insects, finding and photographing several. Taking a break in the Nook, we spotted a yellow-faced Tachinid Fly that was already on the ATBI list as *Archytas* sp. Then I noticed a large Rove Beetle scuttling across the dusty floor, diving under a dead leaf for concealment. What a find - and so large, a good three cm long and about 7-8 mm wide! (See IMAGES.)

As evening wore into twilight, we wondered if there might be a Cougar about. We had found large carnivore scat (segmented, non-coyote) on the river trail in late May and, more recently, a roopy coil of scat consisting mostly of brown hair on the track near the trailer. “Could we talk about something else?” Pat looked around nervously. Not totally unconcerned myself, I said something about “adventure”.

As the sun set, we looked around for bats. We have only seen them once or twice over the years we have been visiting Newport Forest, but we keep hoping. Fireflies showed a kind of progression. At first they winked amid the leaf litter of the forest floor. Then, as if growing bolder, they signalled from nearby bushes. Later on, they could be seen flying up near treetops. At no time were they numerous in the Lower Meadow, although in past years they have bejewelled the vegetation there.

We both heard a strange, descending raspy call and argued about it. “It’s coming from Gallery Forest nearby.” “But I distinctly heard it faintly from the Blind Creek Forest over there.” Could it be a squirrel? They sometimes give an alarm call that sounds similar. But squirrels usually call only in the daylight hours and their alarm call is generally preceded by several shorter calls. The alternative, of course, was the Barn Owl.

We went outside just before Pat went to bed. First a call from nearby, then an answering call from across the meadow. Then another call nearby and one from afar. Things went on like that for several minutes. There were two of them! Must be birds. Must be owls. Must be Barn Owls. We accept such conclusions with caution because Barn Owls are not at all common in our area. In fact, southern Ontario lies outside recent range maps for the species. However, birders do report them from time to time. Next day, we identified a very large, hollowed-out Bitternut snag 100m up the track as the probable home of the near bird.

Alone under a canopy of stars, I watched the waxing half moon slowly descend into the Blind Creek Forest across the Lower Meadow. Want to know how many Raccoons there are in the local superfamily? Kibble is key. Scatter it uniform-sparsely over a wide area and check back in half an hour. Then they were there: three adults, two “teenagers” and three or more little ones. As the kibble grew ever sparser in the grass of the track, adults would snort at each other, then growls, followed by screams of irritation. “What’s that?” a sleepy voice from the trailer. “Not to worry, just Raccoons fighting over kibble.” (No mention of the C-word.)

Sunday dawned sunny and calm. By noon a wind had come up as we awaited the crew carrying out the Annual Butterfly Count in the Skunks Misery forest

complex. They did not show up until nearly two pm. Only three came in, the rest splitting off to other sites. We greeted Stan Caveney (a university entomologist), Cathy Quinlan (naturalist with the Upper Thames River Conservation Area) and Bernie Wiehle (naturalist and Mayor of West Elgin Municipality, as it happens). Running late, they wasted little time and dived into the forest. Pat went with them, net and walkie-talkie in hand. With the counters away, I could continue the ATBI search. Unfortunately, I had the camera set on lo-res, so none of the resulting images were usable, for the most part.

I stopped to count dead treetops around me, most of them winterkill apparently. I wondered if harsh winters would be a coming trend. I took my new invention, a trail cam on a tripod, out to the Lower Meadow to keep a watchful eye on a mysterious burrow I had discovered there last week. The counters returned, tired and thirsty. Pat handed out cans of cold lemonade and we talked butterflies. Three Tawny Emperors were spotted on Mussel Beach. Stan also reported finding a new dragonfly for us, *en passant*, in the Upper Meadow. (See New Species.) They left and, soon enough, it was time for us to go as well.

Phenology: Michigan Lilies and Monarda in bloom; Virginia Deer males have two-point antlers (Trail Cam #1)

Birds: (20) (Several of these birds were reported by naturalist visitors.) American Crow (FCF); American Goldfinch (UM); Baltimore Oriole (RL); Blue Jay (GF); Bobolink (UM); Common Flicker (BCF); Common Grackle (GF); Common Yellowthroat (LM/HBF); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Field Sparrow (LM); Gray Catbird (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (EW); Ovenbird (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (BCF/LM); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF); Song Sparrow (LM); Spotted Sandpiper (TRF); Turkey Vulture (LM); Wood Duck (TR) (several of these birds were reported by our naturalist visitors.)

New Species:

Barn Owl*	<i>Tyto alba</i>	GF KD J106/14
Hallowe'en Pennant	<i>Celithemis eponina</i>	UM SC J106/14
'Yellow-tailed Rove Beetle'	<i>Platydracus [maculosus]</i>	GF KD J105/14
Friendly Proboscis	<i>Proboscis amica</i>	Tr KD J106/14
'Two-striped Sweat Bee'	<i>Lasioglossum sp.</i>	GF KD J106/14
False Milkweed Bug	<i>Lygaeus turcicus</i>	LM KD J105/14
*needs confirmation		

IMAGES:



Removing a concealing leaf revealed this large Rove Beetle. The family Staphylinidae is a very large one, with a great many species. This specimen belongs to the subfamily Staphylininae of Large Rove Beetles.



Lost Raccoon kit at 6:35 am Sunday morning is caught by Trail Cam #1. "Where is everyone?"