

Date and time: Saturday August 08 2015 2:30 - 5:45 pm

Weather: Pr 0 mm; RH 76%; BP 101.7 kPa; overcast; calm; T 20 °C

Activity: Exploring Mussel Beach and pursuing ants.

Our son Jonathan accompanied me down to Newport Forest on this visit. After setting up camp, we made a foray into Blind Creek Forest to re-visit the thatch ants that were found on August 4. We also paid a visit to the river, discovering to our delight that the beach had finally emerged from high water, as shown below.



To start at the beginning, we sat for a while in the Nook to discuss activities for this visit, including a snake walk along the edge of the forest. Jonathan went to the van to retrieve something and on his return, yelled “Ohmigod. A snake.” I ran to where he stood just in time to see a large Eastern Garter winding under the trailer.

Back in the Nook we kept hearing an insistent cooing noise from the giant White Oak on the other side of the trailer. I thought I had heard that call before, but much fainter. Thanks to the Cornell Ornithology website, I identified the source as the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Here’s another recording of what I heard:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrfLVIXZMdl>>

The air was humid and mosquitos were out in force once again. With our gump-tions cranked up to a high level, we set out for Blind Creek Forest, walking the trail nearly to the end, where Aisha and I had found the thatch-ant mound on the

previous site visit. As before, I found the mound ants very difficult to catch in a frame. At one point I was distracted by the appearance nearby of a Wolf Spider carrying a nursery ball. White markings on the otherwise unrelieved grey implied a new species of *Schizocosa*. Back at the mound, our presence soon drove all the surface ants underground, even as we brushed away mosquitos. Finally, in frustration, I scooped off the top two inches of the mound, revealing a myriad of passages and galleries, with literally hundreds of ants swarming in confusion. “Sorry, girls. I had to do that.” We came away with useable imagery, double-timing back to the River Trail through clouds of blood-thirsty mosquitos. More girls!

What a wonderful sight at the river! The shelving clay beach was now exposed, proving to have enough empty clam valves to earn the name Mussel Beach. We spent the next half hour chasing wolf spiders across the newly dry beach. Their big trick was to dash into a mud crack just before you could click the shutter. We inspected the lagoons for stranded fish, searched for examples of granitic rocks in the till that rolled down from the bluffs, and swept nearby plants for arthropods. At one point we came upon a stranded Mucket with valves closed, heavy with the living animal inside. We tossed it back into the river.

On our way back to the trailer, we paused at the Elbow in the river trail. I showed Jonathan where I suspected an ancient stream bed (Blind Creek) to lie. If we can get permission from the TTLT, we hope to dig an exploratory trench to see if there are any stony stream riffles underfoot. That would help to confirm a previous course for Fleming Creek that ran behind the Hogsback, emptying into the Thames below its present mouth. By the time we got back to the Nook it was time to leave.

Among the arthropods found today on the beach were the Pisaurid Spider *Pisaurina mira* and the Orb Weaver *Larinioides cornutus*, as well as possible new species that either evaded us or produced blurry images. In Blind Creek Forest we found the Striped Cricket, *Allonemobius fasciatus*, our first time since 2005.

Phenology: Goldenrod slowly coming into bloom in Lower Meadow.

New Species:

Gray Cross Spider	<i>Larinioides sericatus</i>	LM KD J102/15
‘Short-striped Lycosid’	<i>Schizocosa [ocreata]</i>	BCF KD Au08/15
‘Forest Thatching Ant’	<i>Formica [fusca]</i>	BCF KD Au08/15
Red Goldenrod Aphid	<i>Uroleucon nigrotuberulatum</i>	LM jdKD Au08/15

Species Notes:

Some ant species can only be distinguished by examining their genitalia, a feature frequently used by professionals in ID work. Thus, although our formicine ant matches the morphology of *F. fusca* in every visible detail, it is also a near match to one or two other species of *Formica*. How do I know that our image didn't represent a slight variant of another species? As for the Lycosid spider, the white stripe on the abdomen faded rapidly toward the rear and the forelegs had no brushes, indicating the sister species, *S. ocreata*.

Catching up:

Readers who would like to read past issues of the *Bulletin* are welcome to visit the archive at <http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/> Scroll to the bottom.

IMAGES:



By removing the top two inches of this mound, we exposed many galleries and passages, as shown here. By the time this image was taken the swarming ants had all disappeared. Somewhere deeper down, the Queen remained in her chamber, waiting for workers (or slaves?) to bring their goodies.



This telephoto shot of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo (a.k.a. the Rain Crow) was taken by Newport Forest Steward Darren Jacobs. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo prefers deciduous woodlands and inhabits a summer range that includes the eastern half of North America north to the Great Lakes. One of the few birds that can eat hairy caterpillars, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo may eat large quantities of tent caterpillars and webworms.