Date and time: Thursday April 7 2016 4:50 - 7:45 pm.
Weather: Prec. 104 mm!; RH 82%; BP 99.8; overcast; NW 10 km/hr; T 3ºC
Activity: Hunting for salamanders.

The weather was cold and raw, not the best conditions for a salamander hunt, but that's what Erin, Bruce and I (Newport Stewards all) decided to do today, it being the right time of Spring, in any case. But it was already after 5 pm today and, because the property was so soggy after the recent 104 mm soaking it got, that we elected to walk in. We cleaned up the trailer, relocated the moveable trail cam, and set out for Blind Creek Forest, home of the Vernal Ponds. As we arrived we cocked our ears for sounds of a chorus. However, it was apparently too cold for choir practice. Erin remarked that she had heard healthy choruses in other locales.

We had just turned onto the Blind Creek Trail when a sudden movement caught my eye. Something hardly larger than a cricket had scuttled ("shot" would be a better word) behind some woody debris. I poked at the debris even as I fished for my camera, but another scuttle and it was gone. It was no more than two inches long (not counting any tail) and had dark grey fur. But because of the speed, none of us got a good look at it, let alone a picture. Could it have been a Least Shrew? That would a stretch, even within its northern range, but that's all I could think of.

We rolled log after log, disrupting the spring nap of hundreds of slugs, worms and other creatures, with nary a salamander to see .Erin, an aquatic biologist with the St Clair CA, explained that the best logs were the ones with one end in the water. In the narrow time frame of remaining daylight we had barely an hour to look.

More logs were rolled over and back as we grew increasingly discouraged. It wasn't until we had worked our way back to the trail that Bruce, in a last attempt, rolled a rather large log at which Erin cried, "We got one! It's a Mole Salamander." "You mean a Blue-spotted?" I asked, knowing it would not be new. She explained that the Mole Salamander genus *Ambystoma* had another species, the Jefferson Salamander, that could be mistaken and that hybrids abounded. However, it was okay to enter today's find as *Ambystoma maculata* X (Blue-spotted cross).

The sun was declining by degrees in the west and the air temperature was falling by degrees all around us. There would be no time to re-visit the Harbingers of Spring on the Hogsback slopes. (Donald Craig visited the property recently to count 378 of the plants in that area.) We repaired to the trailer for some submarine sandwiches that Erin had brought. Over the meal Bruce described how a former UWO grad student named Pablo Jaramillo was now working in Mexico to rehabilitate Monarch Butterfly habitat. "It could be," said Bruce, "that the butterfly with my tag on it that Pablo recently found at his site thousands of miles away is one of the larvae from Newport Forest that I raised right here."

Note to Work Crew: Two more trees have fallen over, blocking the main trail.

Phenology: Thames River is up about two feet, creek is up about one foot.

New Species:
New York Carpenter Ant *Camponotus noveboracensis* LM KD Nv03/15

Notes: Going through all our image files for archival purposes recently, I have run across yet another species that we apparently forgot to record.

An Offer We Can't Refuse

Anne Boyd (See her message below.) has offered to do a special your for our readers. If someone will volunteer to help us organize one, we can probably take advantage of Anne's kind offer. Please get in touch with us if you'd like to help.

Trail Cams:

Cam #1 got the usual collection of Virginia Deer, Raccoons, Wild Turkeys, Eastern Cottontails and a lone Coyote. Cam #2 got nine good images of a Long-tailed Weasel (Wendy) in the trailer. (See IMAGES.)

Bulletins Archive: <http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/> — at bottom.

Readers Write:

Keith Langdon is a Biologist with the Great Smoky National Park in the Appalachians. He takes a keen interest in ATBI projects. “This winter was not nearly as cold as the last three, thanks probably to ‘el Nino’. We have several phenology plots, areas where we track plant blooming and/or leaf-out, at different elevations. I have 3 vernal flowering plots at one site that I monitor each spring. Each nearby plot is 4 sq meters, and all open blossoms are counted each week of all species. Seeing lots of interesting trends I think, but analysis app is being revised right now. This spring so far is a bit late, but coming on fast….’peak' is usually in first week or so of April when *Phacelia* mass bloom. Individual species have their own internal cycles also . . . and we see some of that. After a 3-year hitch on the Discover Life in America Board I rotated off in November. [ATBI] continues to be a popular concept though . . I am going to be spending a lot of time with some retired biologist buddies hitting unusual geologies and remote areas for: plants, odonates, bumble bees, some beetle groups, land snails and rare leps. . . I hope your upcoming season is as rewarding as I hope mine is ! If you get down this way ever, let me know and we can go on a hike!”

Recycling email

Dan Bickel, an entomologist with the Australian National Museum, responds to our issue on recycling: “This is all very interesting. Recycling processes have become increasingly sophisticated, but plastic is still a problem and often put in landfill. They are more advanced in much of western Europe for recycling . . . if people are not recycling properly, they get fines. The laziness/ stupidity/ spitefulness/ wastefulness of people [is] always a problem.” Later he adds: “Quite frankly I would prefer to work in a recycling plant than sitting in some boring meeting talking about restructuring or mission statements.”

Sandra Eadie, a nature lover who lives in Toronto, comments on recycling in Toronto: “Fascinating. It is wonderful to see how they have dealt with so many challenges. I looked at the video too. In my condo building in Toronto we do not need to separate paper from containers. Diapers are included in biological recycling and they also accept plastic bags bundled together. So every place is different. I don't know if Toronto just gave up on asking people to separate or they have a special technology. It is hard in a tiny apartment to have the space for biological, paper, container waste. Also they want us to bag shredded paper separately and bag all the plastic bags together as well. . . There is just so much

downloading to the consumer that we can do. Think about how much we all do at work that used to be done by support staff. Sometimes it is too much, I believe. However, I believe that recycling is wonderful and essential.

Readers Bruce Parker and Rebecca Smythe also sent in appreciative remarks on the recycling theme.

Anne Boyd, the Manager of the Municipal Recycling Facility, makes a proposal: "I found the bar graph in the 3rd link [in the article] the most telling. Wow! We have a way to go. Our wide open land mass in North America is a blessing, but it takes the edge off the need to find immediate solutions to alternatives to landfilling. I would love to take a group of your readers through the facility sometime – if you guys do that sort of thing together."

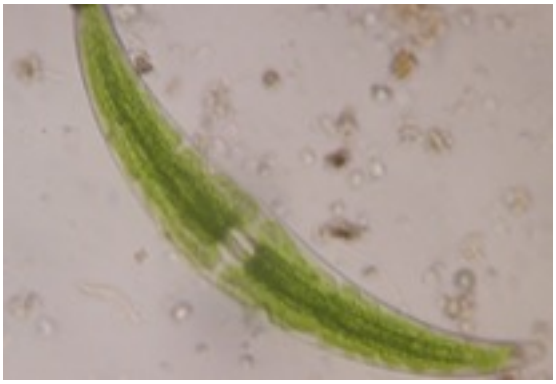
Pathogenic fungi

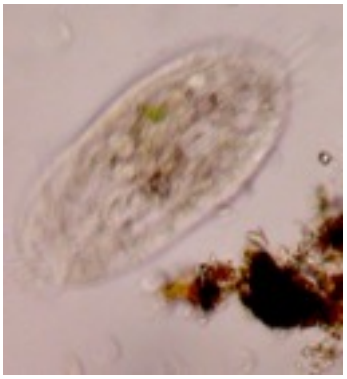
Donald Craig is a forester and Newport Steward: "The target canker in the photo is on a basswood, not a walnut. Normally the species of *Nectria* canker which infects basswood does not infect walnut and vice-versa. However only a fungal expert analysing the fruiting bodies could identify the species of *Nectria*. Considering all the distractions and rambling nature of the walk I thought you did remarkably well putting together a coherent interesting story for people to read."

Greg Thorn is a mycologist. He elaborates on pathogenic fungi: "A couple of small quibbles/questions with the last Bulletin: 1) "The ascomycete called Leafy Brain Fungus (*Tremella foliacea*) had turned a darkish purple and hardened over time." Actually, *Tremella foliaceae* is a basidiomycete, but there is a leafy jelly-asco that has been seen frequently at NF - *Ascocoryne sarcoides*. Both are possibilities. 2) "Here, a fungal disease of the *Nectria* type had attacked its host tree, a Black Walnut. The appearance of target-like rings on bare wood suggests the name "Target Canker" (*Neonectrica ditissima*)." Another canker on walnuts is caused by the butternut canker fungus, *Sirococcus clavigignenti-juglandacearum*. Unfortunately, it also forms cankers on walnut, and thus the more common species acts as a reservoir of the fungus to continue attacking the few individuals of butternut that remain. Its cankers tend to be more slot-like or fusoid than circular and target-like as in your image, so *Neonectria ditissima* . . . seems correct." He adds a link to a "Mushroom Festival" recently held at UWO: http://news.westernu.ca/2016/03/who-said-fungi-cannot-be-fun/

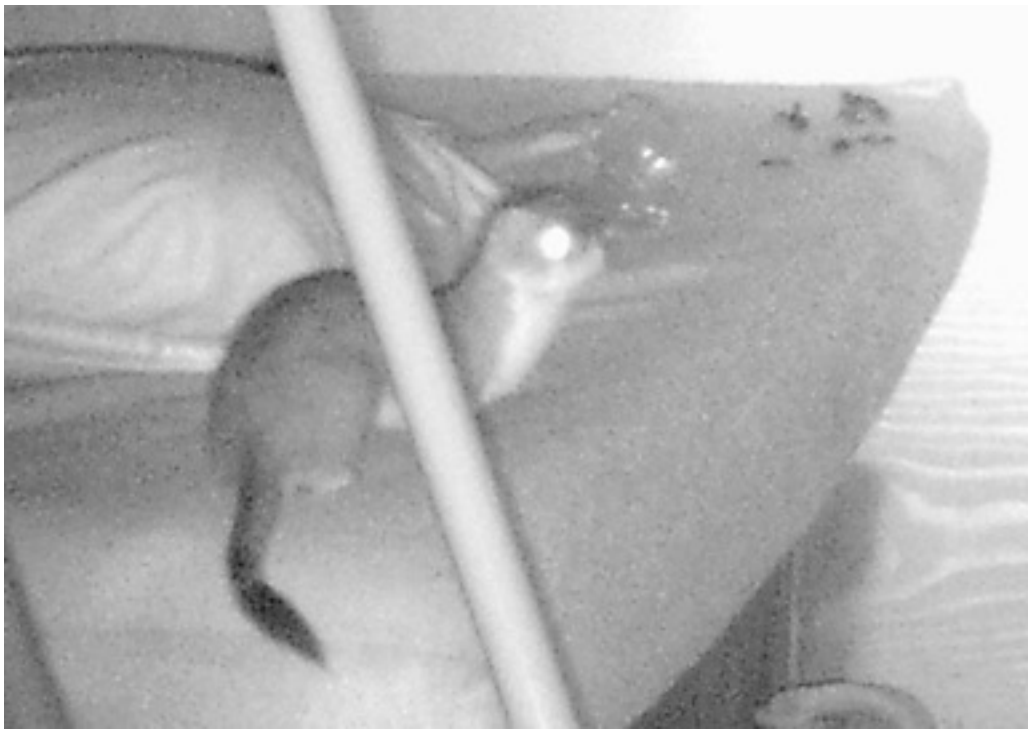
IMAGES:

Erin points to the kind of micro-habitat favoured by newts and salamanders in vernal pond areas — under a log half in the water. She has rolled this log (well-rotted) to reveal the favoured humid substrate.





Two vernal pond micro-denizens showed up in a sample of Vernal Pond A taken by Laura Lee in March. On the left is a Desmid known as *Closterium*. (about 100 spp.) Desmids all have double cells joined in the middle. On the right is a hypotrich, probably a species of *Oxytricha*. (live material) Hypotrichs have little hairs called cirri on the ventral surface and they scoot about on these, as on tiny legs.



Wendy the Weasel (as we call her) is caught by the moveable trail cam that we left inside the trailer on the previous site visit. She poses proudly in front of her “scat station” (in the far corner). Wendy’s eye-shine produces a headlight effect. She has lived in the trailer, off and on, for over two years. Will she have young again this year?