

**Date and time:** Saturday April 30 2016 1:30 - 6:10 pm

**Weather:** Pr 9 mm; RH 62%; BP 102.2 kPa; sun/haze; SE 10 kmh; T 15° C

**Activity:** Finishing maintenance of trail & trailer.

A Tree Swallow sat twittering near the old farm gate as we swung it open. Years ago we put up bird boxes on fence posts along the southern boundary of Newport Forest (Fleming Line) and since then it is a common sight to see Eastern Bluebirds or Tree Swallows nesting in them. It was “cleanup day” for us, in preparation for the Annual Spring Flower Walk, scheduled in a week’s time. Pat pointed to the small Amelanchier by the gate. “Look. It’s blooming. Put it in the phenology.”

There would be only a small window of opportunity to scan the surround before Steve Logan rolled in to help us finish marking the trail. Sitting in the Nook, Pat delighted in the appearance of a small flock of White-throated Sparrows gleaning nearby. My “best bird” of the day came shortly after. Just as I stood at the top of the creek bluffs, staring blankly at the rapids below, in flew a Great Blue Heron to land in the middle of my retina, so to speak. What did I do wrong? I thought I reached *furtively* for my camera, but the bird took alarm and flew off!



Lower Rapids of Fleming Creek: a fishing spot for herons.

I contented myself with a brief survey of the Dandelions growing up and down the (old farm) track by the trailer. About 20-30% of the heads had small ( $\approx 1.2$  mm) wasps exploring their florets. I must have taken two dozen images, picking up a large hover fly in the process. I also circled in behind the trailer to check on the

Raccoon carcass. I am hoping for a *Trox* beetle that specializes in eating hide. No such luck, but last week's Carrion Beetles were still at work and Greenbottle Flies had joined the wrecking crew.

Our bird list had just reached the dozen mark when Steve rolled into camp. He had brought his brother Dean and son-in-law Herb to help with the trail. Four of us set out for the main trail, while Pat washed the trailer floor. We proceeded along the Thames River Trail, from the Hole to the river, over the river bluffs and on into Bluebell Woods, lining the trail, here and there, as we went.

We paused to examine the Virginia Bluebells after entering the Riverside Forest. The Bluebells are now half out; almost every flower head had one or two fully opened blooms. At the 700 m mark we resumed measuring and staking the main trail, up and over the Hogback. Down in the Blind Creek Forest, Steve paused. "D'you hear that?" "What?" "Baby Raccoons. They must be up there in that big tree in the middle." There were no other sounds. Was it too cold for the frogs and toads to resume their chorus? A temperature of 15° C should have been enough.

We ran out of stakes at the 1400 m mark, just short of the junction of the main trail with itself and not far from the Elbow. We plan to finish the marking next Saturday morning, before the flower walkers have gone 1400 m. All five of us then took a break in the Nook, discussing everything from the plumage of Wild Turkeys to the river-as-highway back in the old days. Pat and I stayed to finish up the trailer after the trail gang departed. We worried about the weather next Saturday, without realizing that the predictions two days hence would point to perfect weather.

**Phenology:** Amelanchier, Trilliums in full bloom, Virginia Bluebells in half-bloom, a dozen or more White-throated Sparrows staying over.

**Birds:** (15)

American Crow (LM); American Robin (UM); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (LM/HBF); Canada Goose (BCF); Common Flicker (FCF); Great Blue Heron (LR-FC); Northern Cardinal (GF); Song Sparrow (GF/LM); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (HBF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF/E); White-throated Sparrow (GF); Wild Turkey (FCF).

**New Species:**

'Carbon Crust'	<i>Ustulina deusta</i>	RSF kd/GT Ap24/16
'Bearded Grass Carrier'	<i>Isodontia [auripes]</i>	LM/S KD Ap30/16

**Notes:** Mycology consultant Greg Thorn has identified a black crust fungus that we found on the last visit — a new species, as above. He notes that the name of the cup fungus recorded last week has been changed from *Sarcoscypha coccinea* to *S. austriaca*. Grass-carrying Wasps are ground-nesters, often seen carrying bits of grass to their nests. They then provision their nests with a paralysed tree cricket.

**Old Species:** Northern Paper Wasp (*Polistes fuscatus*); Margined Carrion Beetle (*Oiceoptoma noveboracense*); ‘Marsh-loving Flower Fly’ (*Helophilus fasciatus*); Common Greenbottle (*Lucilia sericata*).

**Wildflower Walk at Newport Forest:** You are invited to join the Newport Forest Stewards on an expertly-guided Wildflower Walk on Saturday, May 7 from 2 to 4 pm. We expect the Virginia Bluebells to be in full bloom. Light refreshments will be provided. Newport Forest is located at 22130 Fleming Line, just southwest of Wardsville. If you need further directions, reply to this bulletin or email Pat at [dewdney@sympatico.ca](mailto:dewdney@sympatico.ca). Angle-park inside the property gate, not along the road.

## IMAGES:



Star of the show: The first blooms of the Virginia Bluebells have now opened and all seems in readiness for the Wildflower Walk on Saturday.



This Syrphid is the first Flower Fly that we have seen this year so far. In giving this species a casual handle, I used the Greek name *Helophilus* as “Marsh” (Helo) and “Lover” (Philus). Syrphids are one of the most speciose of fly families on site.



The Eastern Grey Squirrel has two (permanent) coat phases, black and grey — or three phases, if you count the all-white (not Albino) squirrels in Exeter and along Lake Huron. The black phase squirrels (left) have been most numerous in southern Ontario for decades, but the grey ones (right) may be making a comeback. (With thanks to Trailcam #2.)