

Date and time: Saturday May 28 2016 1:20 - 6:10 pm

Weather: Pr 3 mm; RH 59%; BP 101.6 kPa; cloud/sun; S 10 kmh; T 27°C

Activity: Familiarization tour for an environmental consultant.

The hottest day of the year so far wrung out its humid clouds in the form of pop-up rainstorms. It was “spitting” when I arrived at Newport Forest in the company of Will Van Hemessen, an experienced field botanist and birding expert, as well. The image below shows Will standing beside the Jane Bowles memorial tree, Jane was our botanical consultant until her untimely death in the summer of 2013.



Before long the sun emerged to shine on our walk to the Sandbar, a unique bit of geography on site that I thought might harbour some new plant species. On the way, we stopped at the Elbow so that I could show Will the very spots where the rare Green Dragon plant had been found. He then took gps readings of the locations, hoping to see the plants later on when (and if) they emerged.

“Ah,” I said, staring down at my feet, “Here are the White Man’s Footprints” a native term for the alien Plantain species that appeared shortly after the arrival of European settlers. “Actually,” corrected Will, “that particular Plantain is native, *Plantago rugelii*.” “First kill”, I murmured to myself, echoing what Jane once said during a bioblitz to signal the first new plant of the day.

I was surprised as we made our way to the river, to see Jewelwing damselflies. Why so early? The answer came in the form of a humming sound in my ear: mosquitoes. They-y-y-r-e ba-ack. Luckily the former prey on the latter. Somewhere a Gray Tree Frog burred as we arrived at the Landing. We stopped to sit on the river bluffs bench, high above the slowly subsiding water. Mussel Beach is now almost wholly emerged. As we made our way down to the Riverside Forest,

Will pointed out *Viburnum recognitum* growing beside us. This would be our next new plant species and the seventh species of *Viburnum* known on site. “Did you hear that Green Frog down there?” asked Will? I hadn’t. All along we had been running into American Toads that quickly scrambled to safety as we barged into their sunning spots. We saw perhaps five in all, on the day.

The Riverside Forest was like a jungle, steaming and tropical. We stopped to examine a Carrion Flower that Will noticed just off-trail. “Take a sniff,” he invited. Whew! (See IMAGES.) The vegetation along the trail was so high that I missed the spur line to the Sandbar, overshooting it by 50 m or so. We struggled through wet knee-high nettles, Garlic Mustard, and other wonderful plants, tripping on invisible logs (Will not so much) until, more by chance than design, we came upon the Sand Bar. The sand was damp and firm, spoiling my plan to go “fishing” for Ant Lions. However, there were some bright green Six-spotted Tiger Beetles about, both there and elsewhere. A lone Mourning Cloak Butterfly hugged the sand.

Making our way back to the main trail, we came upon an old log with several Rove Beetle scurrying over it. I recognized the species from a few years back, the Yellow-tailed Rove Beetle. “I wonder if you have *Agastache* on your plant list,” said Will, pointing to a nearby plant. He also pointed out a grass with a profuse seed head, calling it the Bearded Shorthusk. Both plants, as it turned out, were new. When we got back to the river bluffs, I had to rest my aching hip muscles, an infirmity that has been with me off and on for a few years now. Will continued along the trail toward the River Landing, while I scanned the far shore for Spiny Soft-shell Turtles. Suddenly there was a splash below me, right where the bluffs obscured my view of the beach. Spreading rings hinted at a turtle. When I finally ran into Will, he mentioned flushing a Spiny Soft-shell on Mussel Beach. Voilà.

Back in camp we decided that Will could complete the tour without me. He walked along the Gallery Forest up to the Power Line Meadow and along that into the west end of the Blind Creek Forest, while I stayed in camp to reload the trail cam batteries and then wandered about with the insect net and Lumix camera, getting what I could in the way of new finds, with a new moth, the Gray Dagger Moth to show for my efforts. When Will returned, he reported hearing an Eastern Phoebe and a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, a new bird species for us! He also ran into a thick population of Wood Ticks, but succeeded in brushing them off. Will’s final venue was the rarely visited West Meadow, a perfect example of old field succession (without any human help). He reported several species already known on site, then proceeded to brush off even more Wood Ticks.

Birds: (23)

American Crow (TR); American Goldfinch (LM); Barn Swallow (Rd); Blue Jay (GF); Blue-winged Warbler (PLM); Common Grackle (TR); Common Yellowthroat (LM); Eastern Kingbird (LM); Eastern Phoebe (LM); Eastern Wood Peewee (BBW); Field Sparrow (LM); Gray Catbird (GF); Killdeer (TR); Northern Flicker (BCF); Northern Oriole (BCF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (TR); Song Sparrow (TR); Spotted Sandpiper (TR); Turkey Vulture (WM); Wood Thrush (BCF); Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (PLM); Yellow-billed Cuckoo (BCF); Yellow Warbler (LM).

Phenology: first mosquitoes, jewelwings out and about.

New Species: (13% - applies to arthropods only)

Rugel's Plantain	<i>Plantago rugelii</i>	Elb WVH My28/16
Bearded Shorthusk	<i>Brachyelytrum erectum</i>	BBW WVH My28/16
Hummingbird Mint	<i>Agastache [nepetoides]</i>	BBW WVH My28/16
Stour Goldenrod	<i>Solidago squarrosa</i>	WM WVH My28/16
Gray Dagger Moth	<i>Acronicta grisea</i>	LM KD My28/16
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax flaviventris</i>	PLM WVH My29/16

Old Species:

Dreamy Duskywing (*Erynnis icelus*); Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*); Ebony Jewelwing (*Calopteryx maculata*); Impatient Bumblebee (*Bombus impatiens*); 'Black Mirid' (*Capsus ater*); 'Meadow Plant Bug' (*Leptoterna dolobrata*); 'Yellow-tailed Rove Beetle' (*Platydracus maculosus*).

Readers Write:

Allen Woodliffe, a local biologist, writes about a recent visit to Newport Forest, excerpted as follows: "I had a wonderful time for a couple of hours or so. It was a bit warmer than I expected, but quite pleasant. I didn't want to leave it too long, as I feared the warmer weather might bring on the demise of the Bluebells." He sent along some amazing images of both Bluebells and Cream Violets. (See IMAGES.) He also kept a bird list of some 31 bird species, complete with counts. His best birds (in our opinion) were Purple Martin, Bank Swallow, Brown Thrasher and Magnolia Warbler, these being the birds that we record least often.

IMAGES:



Bend over and take a whiff of this Carrion Flower (*Smilax herbacea*) and you will instinctively recoil at the scent of rotting flesh! the scent attracts flies and beetles that live on carrion — to pollinate the flowers!



The Cream Violet is an uncommon flower, yet it grows in profusion in the Riverside Forest on site. (Photo: Allen Woodliffe)



A bluish variant of the 'Yellow-tailed Rove Beetle' (*Platydracus maculosus*) may be relatively common on site. *Platydracus* has about a dozen species, none of them with a dash of yellow in the terminal segment except this one. This striking species is found (so far) on and in rotted logs. Rove Beetles have only vestigial wings, covered by reduced elytra. The sexes of these beetles tend to be difficult to tell apart. Note the deadly-looking jaws!