

**Date and time:** Tuesday November 29 2016 1:55 - 4:25 pm

**Weather:** Pr 18 mm; RH 75%; BP 100.2 kPa; cloudy; SW 05-10 kmh; T 14°C

**Contents:** A walkabout with Steward Darren Jacobs.

We expected to have some tricky driving along the access road into Newport Forest (“The Track”) following some heavy rains the night before. But the ground had dried out with remarkable speed, probably due to its great thirst. Precipitation over the year has been barely half the regional norm!



Darren sits in the Nook to illustrate its use. A clearing, a circle of chairs & benches, under the protective limbs of a giant Black Maple growing at the edge of the creek bluffs.

As a native person, Darren has had a lifelong interest in game and all kinds of wildlife, generally. He described how, just before my arrival, he had stood above the creek bluffs in the Upper Meadow to watch two does feeding by Fleming Creek below. He then demonstrated his crow call to me, a hollow tube with some kind of vibrating reed inside. It made an ear-splitting crow-like call (uncannily crow-like) that could be heard at the other end of Elgin County. Earlier the call had brought in a whole “murder” of crows. “Too bad you wren’t here for that,” said Darren. “I’ll do it again when we get down to camp.”

We sat in the Nook for a while to catch up on Darren’s news and then he asked if I had noticed. “It’s too quiet here.” What did he mean? “There’s no birds calling for

one thing, except those crows in the distance. None of the usual sounds, even for this time of year.” “Ominous silence?” I ventured. “Yeah, right.”

We set out for the river to check on water conditions and to bring back the trail cam currently stationed there. Darren has been unable to run his motor boat on the river all year, thanks to low water levels (lack of rain); the propellor would jam on rocks at every rapids he tried to pass. During times of plentiful rain he would occasionally visit Newport Forest by motorboat, a faint echo off the days when the Thames (then called “La Tranche”) was the only highway in these parts.

Near the River Landing I spotted some curious little mushrooms sprouting from a log: Fairy Fans (*Spathulariopsis volutipes*). (See IMAGES below.) Darren then heard a Belted Kingfisher calling from the mouth of Fleming Creek, just upstream. On the way back we stopped at a bend in the trail that we call The Elbow. “Let’s call in the crows.” After several calls, he paused, waiting. Then, in the distance came what seemed like answering calls. “Here they come.” He pointed through tree limbs overhead. First two, then three more, then more. They circled overhead, as though looking for a place to land. “Don’t move a muscle and don’t make a sound!” I must have moved. “Darn! They seen you. There they go.”

We brought Trail Cam #2 back from the river, with the idea of setting it up near the Nook. We then talked about the possibility of a global insect decline, guessing at possible impacts on other wildlife, coining a new slogan in the process: “No bugs, no birds, no bats.” At the end of our all-too brief stay, Darren decided that the best location for Trail Cam #2 was right up in the tree facing the bird feeder there. “You might even get a flying squirrel tonight,” he said. Just then he spotted a large black moth fluttering across the Nook. He called for me to bring my net from the van — quickly. With the net in hand he followed the moth by eye, picking his way through a thick stand of saplings to get close. The moth flew down to the leaf litter and he brought the net down on it with decisive force. He gave me the net, folded.

We looked inside the bag, gingerly removing debris. No moth. “Are you sure the moth was where you thought it was?” “It could’ve flown off when I wasn’t looking for a second.” He thought he saw a lone mosquito in the net. I got several shots of the insect to guarantee one or two sharp images. Imagine my surprise when I got home to examine the images more carefully. I already knew it was too large to be a mosquito. It turned out to be our first Winter Crane Fly.

Darren reported hearing a Red-bellied Woodpecker calling from the Blind Creek Forest. That brought the number of birds observed today to a grand total of just

four! I wouldn't add a fifth until leaving the property a few minutes later: I watched a magnificent Northern Harrier swooping over a harvested field, showing its white tail-patch, insignia of the Northern Harrier Air Force.

**Trail Cam Report:** Trail Cam #1 at The Hole has been picking up many Virginia Deer, bucks and does, feeding in a vegetated area just off the trail opposite the camera. About a dozen such feeding incidents were recorded over the two untended weeks, marking it as a favoured browse area.

**Birds:** (5 - pathetic)

American Crow (FCF); Belted Kingfisher (TR); Blue Jay (GF); Northern Harrier (HP); Red-bellied Woodpecker (BCF).

**Phenology:** First snowfall of the cold seasons was on November 20.

**New Species:**

Winter Crane Fly                      *Trichocera* sp.                      GF djKD Nv2916

**Readers Write:**

Dave Wake: a well-known area naturalist and current Chair of the Thames Talbot Land Trust writes about the Fungus Workshop: "Thanks very much for organizing today's workshop. It was a beautiful afternoon to be out, and we enjoyed learning about some of the fungi. I am attaching a couple of photos from today's workshop. One shows the Bird's Nest fungus as we found it on the log."

Dave's wife Winnie, a naturalist of equal calibre, notes a surprising frog: "In case you are keeping a list of herps for the fungus workshop day, we should mention that we heard a Spring Peeper calling that afternoon."

Mycologist Greg Thorn wrote in response to some fungal images sent on the occasion of the visit reported here: "Glad to see you have been out during this prolonged fall!" He confirms our ID of the Fairy Fans and a Late Fall Oyster seen during the walk with Darren. He thought that the third fungus, mysterious to us, was a species of *Phellinus*.

Newport Steward Bruce Parker writes about his wife's visit to Laos: "Jinny is traveling in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Here [are] some local fungi in Laos. I do see a Red Banded Polypore here." (See IMAGES for image of Laotian fungi.)

**IMAGES:**



This image of Striated Birds Nest Fungus (*Spathulariopsis striatus*) was taken by Dave Wake. Each nest originally contained spore-packed “eggs”, expelled from the cups by rain drops as a dispersal mechanism.



The Velvet Stalked Fairy Fan (*Spathulariopsis velutipes*) but belongs to an entirely different phylum than most mushrooms and brackets. The difference lies mainly in the spores, being produced inside an ascus.



photo courtesy of Jinny Behrens

Laotian boy samples fungi collected in the forest by family members. The table reminds us of the table at Newport Forest during the Fungus Workshop, with multiple species all laid out. These fungi are all presumably edible and much prized by the people who eat them.