

Newport Forest

Friday August 18 2006 1:45 - 3:55 pm

Weather: prec. 9mm*; RH 78%; sn/cld; calm; LM 35C; FCF 27C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Kee

The girls did not deign to show themselves after I came in today. Nor had they appeared when the Murrays arrived with their monster raccoon named "Sonny." Sonny was in a large cage which took two of us to carry into the BCF, where we found the wheelbarrow, using it to cart Sonny to the RL. We carried the cage to the far end of the beach. Sonny did not want to leave at first, but soon wandered the beach in a confused state, then headed into the forest, where he wandered very little, perhaps trying to orient himself. Sonny is a very large male who was supposed to be released last summer but was not owing to a medical problem of Ken's.

I went up on the bluff trail, waiting for Sonny to come onto it - which he did after about 15 minutes. We then got Sonny to follow us into the "new trail" (terrace) forest, where the visibility is good and the veg much simpler. I made sure Sonny got several whiffs of my hands and clothing then I suggested we release him near the base of a boxelder, which he dutifully climbed to a point where the lean of the tree provided a nice level platform. After saying their goodbyes, The Murrays quietly left and I stayed with Sonny, watching his sides heaving in and out rapidly. He was nervous, scared and excited all at the same time, I'm sure. I waited until his breathing was regular, then left. He has about three weeks to shed much of his weight and to improve his muscle tone - otherwise he could have a serious fall.

The Murrays radioed me from the trailer as I walked out. The girls had come out of their box and were busily eating the food I had left out for them earlier. All this time, I had been hearing an unusual number of Grackles calling, from virtually every part of the property. What was going on? At 5:20 pm, I heard a mighty rushing noise outside the trailer, thinking a freak tornado had started up. But it was Grackles, over 500 of them, forming a huge cloud over the LM that moved like smoke to EW, where it settled into the treetops.

I made a supper of beans, which held little interest for the girls. After supper I decided to go and check on Sonny. The girls insisted on accompanying me, so we all walked to the RSF, moving slowly so as not to stress Thelma & Louise. I stayed in the release area, calling and whistling, all to no avail. I left some supplemental food & water, then returned to the trailer, the girls bounding

* fell Saturday

dutifully behind me. By the time we got to the Nook, the girls were staggering, so I took them into the trailer for a rest in the bedroom. After returning from closing the gate, I checked on the sisters. At first I thought Thelma was dead. She could barely move. And one of them had vomited all over the cover. Later, I couldn't find Thelma and fantasized that she had crawled away to die somewhere. It did not help the situation that Louise constantly burbled all this time, unhappy about something. (She must sense something dire about Thelma, I thought.)

At 10:45 pm, there was a tremendous crashing noise as another Bitternut fell over in the BCF. This only increased my sense of foreboding.

But by midnight the sisters were back in full operation, trashing the upper shelf. It was only at their next feeding that I realized that Louise was the one who vomited. She ate like a pig, while Thelma ate only a little - and she stopped burbling, presumably because her stomach no longer hurt.

After midnight, Long Stripe came out to feed near the trailer, accompanied by a kit who was a dead ringer for Thelma. Both Thelma & Louise watched from the deck, huffing nervously from time to time. Later, Short Stripe came by, also in the company of one of her (much larger) kits. (Where were the other kits?)

In the morning, a light rain started around 9 am and continued to build slowly. At 10:40 am, I heard another mighty crash, this one from the FCF, as another BH fell over. This is all one of the indirect results of our current drought. (One year of good rain does not end a drought like this one.)

At 11 am the Murrays drove in and (reluctantly) I accompanied them into the RSF to find poor Sonny. We were not surprised that he did not show up. After all, it was raining steadily and he was not about to leave whatever shelter he'd been able to find. We left more food and went out. The girls slept in the trailer almost to the time of my departure. I booted them out and gave them a final lunch. They watched me leave from the young walnuts that grow by the weather station.

Nirds: (14 - not many spp. about)

American Crow (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (LM); Cedar Waxwing (TR); Common Grackle (BCF); Common Yellowthroat (EW); Eastern Screech Owl (BCF); Eastern Towhee (BCF); Eastern Wood Peewee (RSF); Great Blue Heron (FC); Mourning Dove (LM); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Turkey Vulture (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr);

New species: (from the Malaise samples of 2005)

Pseudoscorpion	fam. Chernetidae	RL Au31/05 nz/KD
Springtail	<i>Lepidocyrtus paradoxus</i>	RL Au31/05 nz/KD
Earwigfly	<i>Merope tuber</i>	RL Au31/05 nz/KD
(fam. Meropeidae, Order Mecoptera)		
“Fringed Bark Louse”	<i>Lichenomina</i> sp.	RL Au31/05 nz/KD
“Smoky Bark Louse”	<i>Cerastipsocus venosus</i>	RL Au31/05 nz/KD
(both in Psocoptera)		

Phenology: Grackles congregating in large numbers