

Newport Forest Wednesday March 29 2006

2:30 - 4:40 pm*

Weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 44%; sun/cld; calm; LM 15 C; FCF 15 C

Purpose: two-day stay

Participants: Pat & Kee

I'm glad I decided to stop at the TS on the way in. Most of the little trees in Bed 2 had been heaved right out of the soil, lying with their roots mostly exposed. I thought it might be frost heaves (of some weird kind) rather than animals, as the soil was very soft and damp, taking impressions most readily. (No tracks of any kind) I replanted as many as I could find, but ended up with hands so muddied that Pat had to wash them off from the back of the van.

A red-tailed Hawk and a Turkey Vulture took turns escorting us to the lower meadow, where a symphony was performed by the frog chorus. Not a great many, to be sure, but this was only the second or third day. We set to work on the trailer, me washing the floor and Pat cleaning the higher surfaces. The afternoon was warm enough to be called "windbreaker weather." While Pat watched the many new bird arrivals, I checked the LM planting, noting that although some trees looked iffy, many looked robust and ready for some real growth. The precipitation to this point in the year is more than double the precipitation over the corresponding period of last year and more than four times that for 2004!

We walked the TRT, Pat intending to go only part way, at first. We passed the chain of vernal ponds, noting their high level. Everywhere underfoot, shy shoots of grass and sedge peeked out. We stopped at the RL to check the cedars to find two of the volunteers of 2004 and two of the plantees (Rae Axford prov.) On the river bluffs, we sat on the high bench, listening to a chorus of Red-winged Blackbirds across the river. Then I became curious about a tree only slightly downslope which sported a wreath of river drift. (3P) (The flood had apparently reached about 13 m above its "normal" level. To us that seems phenomenal.) I thought the tree was an Ironwood, about 3-4 m high, a male with catkins. What made it interesting was its isolated and somewhat precarious position on the bluff-face, the average downslope being steeper than 45 degrees. (Next day I found several more on the bank of Fleming Creek and in "perched" situations, as well.)

* next day

As we descended the bluff trail into the RSF, we both heard that rattling call and Pat caught the blue and black flash, through the screen of bare trees of a kingfisher!

The scenery inside the RSF was surprisingly pleasant, with the sunlight glowing on the wreckage of trees and a distant garden of Garlic Mustard being mistaken for Virginia Bluebells. I searched for the latter but found nothing up yet. We wound our way up the the HB, where we sat on the bench for a rest and a look around. Pat thought there might be Woodcocks displaying somewhere up on the HB currently. She spotted a Brown Creeper ascending a tree ahead of us. Then we descending into the BCF, where I could see signs that the vernal ponds had already begun to shrink, as if the (relatively) parched soil below were sucking on it.

I showed Pat the special Blue Ash upslope of the bench. To return the favour, she showed me a Beech nearby that I had never noticed before. If this forest follows the pattern of Harvey's, not far upstream, it will fill with Beech. In this case it will be a clonal stand, this stem the mother tree.

We dined in the trailer, noting a raccoon resting supine on the second fork of the old Black Maple over the nook. Pat thought she might be a mother with kits in the box. I tried to film the raccoon, but had trouble with the focus as soon as I started a slow zoom. I abandoned the project to walk around to the other side of the tree to see her/it's face. It had a sandy aspect, the colour of the lighter fur over a solid mask, the colour about her/it's muzzle. I thought she was sort of "cute," so Pat may be right. Before heading up the road to the gate, we saw the same raccoon by the log, eating the puppy chow there. She scurried off down the trail soon after I put the flashlight on her.

Pat heard it long before I did, that tiny brief buzz, heard faintly over the meadow from the far ravine. I thought she was imagining things. But I heard at least four of the buzzes and this was exactly the right time of dusk for Woodcocks to display. We stopped by Edgar & Nina's, locked the gate, and headed back, with some Tundra Swans trumpeting from a low altitude, then directly overhead, amid stars that were wonderfully bright. To our right (at first) was the Big Dipper, with Orion (brrr) and Cassiopeia over on the left, Polaris up and ahead. Our Pole Star.

By the time we got back to the trailer, Pat had walked longer than at any time since last fall. Around 9 pm I went out to look at the Hickory feeder by flashlight, only to find "Sandy" up on the tray. (Oh, how I hope she was only after the seeds!) She scuttled, but in a dignified and leisurely way, down the shaggy bark and off into the night. We discussed the possibilities of a new litter nearby. Overnight the temperature dropped to - 4 C. With both stove burners turned low, we braved the twin perils of death by freezing and/or CO poisoning.

We awakened to a brilliant sun, a new warmth, and a wonderful dawn chorus, Pat exulting in renewed relations, even with the Brown-headed Cowbird who had, after all, made it here at her own expense.

At 11:30 am four large wild turkeys made their way sedately into the LM from the BCF by Edgar's Trail. There were two toms and two hens. Every minute or so, one of the toms would spread his tail and shuffle his wings. The females took no interest in these displays and returned to the BCF. The males looked "droopy" after that, soon wandering off, themselves. Again I tried to take a video, this time of the turkeys. The ideal shot for a zoom and the focus goes awry again. (Later I noted a button marked "focus" on the other side of the camera from the zoom control.) In future, I'll have to use my left hand to focus, while my right works the zoom. Tricky.

Between times I wandered the LM more or less systematically to make an informal map of the various ant mounds scattered across the LM in great profusion. The mound ants have to be as great a force in soil cycling in the LM as the earthworms themselves. Here is how they are distributed over the last 200 m of the LM heading north.

Weather at 2 pm: RH 46%; clear; calm; LM 19 C; FCF 17 C

We drove to the UM, where Pat planted about 200 walnuts from a pile she had left to rot last fall. I dug the better part of a ditch into which, one day, we shall roll the great, heavy steel drain pipe that Edgar gave me several years ago. It will drain down into the ravine nearby.

I walked the FCT to the log bridge. I found nearly a tonne of branch and tree debris collected both upstream, under the bridge and downstream of it.

Birds: (26)

American Crow (FCF/S); American Goldfinch (GF); American Robin (GF); American Woodcock (HL); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Common Grackle (Tr); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); European Starling (Tr); Hairy Woodpecker (Tr); Killdeer (UM); Kingfisher (TR); Mourning Dove (Tr); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (HBF); Red-winged

Blackbird (TR); Song Sparrow (GF/E); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); Tundra Swan (UM); Turkey Vulture (FCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (BCF); Wild Turkey (LM)