

## Tree Planting Drought & Oil

Newport Forest Thursday/Friday April 30/May 1 2010 2:35/5:15 pm

weather: prec. 0 mm; RH 64%; BP 100.5; NW 10 kmh; ovcst; T 18° C  
purpose: two-day stay  
participants: Pat. Kee

The Red Squirrel appeared at the Maple feeding tray almost as soon as it was filled. This population may be shifting or extending south on the property from the pine woods of the Janik property to the north. Shortly after that, a Chipmunk showed up to wait its turn. Several hours later a pair of (black) Eastern Gray Squirrels appeared at both feeders. After sunset we waited in vain for the fourth member of the squirrel family to show up -- the Southern Flying Squirrel.

The starving female raccoon wandered into camp in the late afternoon. We had a good look at her face and will claim that she is a daughter of Two-stripe, owing to her having the same rather unusual facial marking as last summer's matron. It is not unusual, when food supplies are limited, for the feeding group to exclude others (even siblings) from the source. Because her brothers (the Waldos) are so mean to her, this female must forage by day. We watched her climb the maple, revealing eight swollen teats. How thin is the milk for her kits? For the sake of a handle, we'll call her Wanda.

Pat, meanwhile, did some serious birding, spotting a pair of Purple Finches. At first she thought she was going crazy, seeing a half-grosbeak, half-cardinal. We have only one other record of the Purple Finch, dating to 2005. (Later we sent our photo to the Wakes, who confirmed the bird.)

In the remainder of the afternoon, we planted some young trees around the first vernal ponds in the Blind Creek Forest: 4 Swamp White Oak and 5 Bitternut Hickory trees. After a white-trash supper in the trailer, we headed up to the "Swale," a seepage zone adjacent to the "Mudhole" on the farm track. While planting several willow wands in the Swale, Pat started an Eastern Cottontail, which bounded off as if for its very life.

Around sunset, I decided to walk the Thames River Trail. A misty, suffused light invaded the woods, still strong enough to see the Virginia Bluebells. I accidentally took an artistic picture of their blooms when the low battery on my cameras failed to produce a flash. The flowers looked phosphorescent. Up over the Hogsback and down into the Blind Creek Forest, where I was severely startled (as always) by the overhead crash of several Wild Turkeys fleeing their overnight roosts high in the canopy. A shower of twigs and sticks generated by their powerful wings rained down on me. I disturbed two more flocks before emerging from the woods. Along the vernal ponds where Pat & I had planted this afternoon, I heard two Spring Peepers calling. The frog chorus this year has been rather weak, possibly owing to the low precipitation. Pat reported that the Woodcock had "displayed" in my absence, making several buzzing flights.

Pat turned in early to let her MS catch up with an overly active day. I stayed up, as usual, reading in the trailer's breakfast nook by the light of a kerosene lamp. My book was a history of the local oil industry. In 1860, oil was discovered at Enniskillen, about 20 miles to the north of us. Within a year or two, derricks stretched as far as the eye could see, while other fields sprang up at Bothwell & Rodney. (Later, oil was discovered further south at Titusville PA.) It was not gasoline that drove the enterprise, but kerosene, the very light I read by. Oil soaked the ground at the Enniskillen field and slowly made its way, by seepage & runoff, to Bear Creek. One evening a rather thoughtless gentleman lit his pipe and tossed the match into the creek, setting it ablaze for miles. What a sight that must have been!

Next morning we rose at 6:30, but Pat was still not sufficiently rested. She went back to bed while I went for a short walk to inspect the Regen Zone. I flushed last night's Woodcock, which whirred away. Then I too, went back to bed. missing Alan Woodliffe, noted naturalist and plant expert, who drove in to photograph the bluebells. Then Darren rolled in with some coffee from Tim Horton's. He was worried about the great oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. I felt mildly guilty. In a manner of speaking, the spill had started at Enniskillen. Then Alan came out of the woods, stopping to chat a bit at the Nook before heading out.

As the day wore on, the wind shifted from the SW to S and the air temperature slowly climbed to 27° C. Once again the Gulf of Mexico was in our minds. We repaired to the creek to plant two box Elders, several willow wands and a Sycamore not far from the shore. Then, while Pat packed up, I drove up to the Drought-buster to load up on water. We watered the red-flagged trees as a precaution against the possible failure of tomorrow's predicted rainfall. The wind was now gusting up to 50 kmh, setting the hydro lines that crossed the meadow- rise to moan and sing. Then we found our first wood-ticks of the season, one on the trailer deck, the other climbing up my leg. It was obviously time to leave.

birds: (22) [note the four Americans!]

American Crow (LM); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (GF); American Woodcock (LM/BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (GF);

Common Grackle (HP); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Screech Owl (BCF); Eastern Towhee (Tr); Field Sparrow (UM); Great Blue Heron (FC/TR); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Purple Finch (GF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Song Sparrow (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF)

new species: (these complete the Marshall one-day inventory of last summer)

Alkali Bluet Enallagma [clausum] NF SM J130/10

'Two-spotted Tree Cricket' Neoxabia bipunctata NF SM J130/09

'White-banded Hover Fly' Dasysyrphus [albostratus] NF SM J130/09

**IMAGES:**

*(click on image to enlarge)*



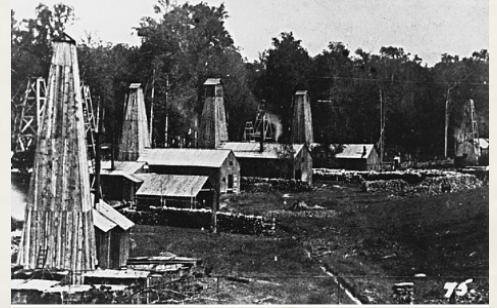
*A (breeding?) pair of Purple Finches can barely be discerned in this image of the Gallery Forest understorey.*

*(click on image to enlarge)*



*I call this masterpiece, "Bluebells by Night"*

*(click on image to enlarge)*



*oil derricks at the Enniskillen Field*