

Date & Time: Friday May 10 2013 2:15 - 8:00 pm

Weather: Pr 4 mm; RH 38%; BP 101.6 kPa; clear; NW 0 - 5 kmh; T 28° C

Activity: Chasing Bee Flies and other arthropods

In spite of a light rain last night, the property was dry today and readily accessible by van. It was time to resume the ATBI project, now that what we call the “social season” (with its many visitors) is over. I was delighted to see a Shagbark



Hickory in the Regeneration Zone looking so healthy. Bee Flies are so abundant this time of year, I decided to see how many I could collect. As it turned out there were two species hovering around the camp. I had no idea they were so tricky to net, but with a little practice, I got reasonably good at catching them, then trans-

ferring them to a baggie for a photo session. It turned out they were all the same species, except for a small one with different markings. It got away, naturally. Only later did I recall that not all Bee Flies have pile on their body and a long proboscis to probe flowers. Nothing daunted, I went after some small “wasps” going about the same general business of hovering here and there low to the ground, nabbing two of those. They weren't wasps, but Cuckoo Bees and their “business” was much different, as it turned out.

Venturing further afield, I came upon an active ant mound. There are over 80 of these in the Lower Meadow alone. A number of the inhabitants (*Formica exsectoides* group) were fully occupied trying to drag a reddish brown spider (possibly an Amaurobiid or hacklemesh weaver) into an entrance hole of the nest

The hunt was interrupted by Steve rolling into the camp to return the canoe from its winter storage. He and his daughter Leona joined me in the Nook for drinks and a chat. Somehow we got on the subject of the spirit world and birds as omens. The smallest birds, explained Steve, convey the most important omens. Then he told a story to illustrate the point. (See below.)

After Steve and Leona left, I decided to hunt for salamanders in the Blind Creek Forest. I rolled over close to 50 logs around the margins of two vernal ponds, finding nothing but earthworms. A lone Gray Tree Frog occasionally called. At the edge of one pond, I found a juvenile Wood Frog resting by the shore. (See IMAGES below.) Chimney Crayfish have been very active in recent weeks. Clayball chimneys seemed to have sprouted everywhere.

Back in camp, I was greeted at the Nook by the roaring noise of a very large animal. My first thoughts were “bear”, no “cougar”. (It was that loud.) After trying to locate the sound for several minutes, I realized it was coming from the Raccoon nursery box in the Black Maple overhead. There was a mother inside. I recognized the “Don't disturb me” growl, but greatly amplified by the nursery box. Then a kit whined. (See IMAGES below.) I had a light supper in the Nook, then departed to the accompaniment of a cheerful toad chorus from the Blind Creek Forest.

Birds: (18)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Brown-headed Cowbird (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Eastern Towhee (UM); Field Sparrow

(HBF); Mourning Dove (BCF); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF); Song Sparrow (LM); Tree Swallow (UM); Turkey Vulture (BCF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF)

Phenology:

First mosquitoes out; (Wood ticks My05/13) Skunk Cabbage and Jack-in-the-Pulpit both half grown; Field Strawberries in flower. All trees now leafing out or breaking bud, except for Black Walnut, the last to do so.

New Species:

Cuckoo Bee *Nomada* sp. Nk KD My09/13

Cuckoo Bees are kleptoparasites. Our specimens were not looking for flowers, but for the ground nests of other bees to lay her eggs in. The Cuckoo bee larva consumes any food in its cell, including host larvae as well. The genus *Nomada* has over 850 species!

How Birds Got Their Songs (A traditional Delaware story)

One day Creator said, "It's time you birds started to sing. I have put all your songs high in the sky. One of you must fly up and bring them down for the others. "I'll go," said the Hawk, a boastful bird. "For I am a mighty flier and the best suited for the job." So Hawk flew up, higher and higher. But he became exhausted before he reached the place where the songs were kept and he had to come down again. Then the Eagle, an even more boastful bird, said "I am Eagle, mightier than all of you. Surely this job is for me."

Just before Eagle took off, little Sparrow found a place to sit behind Eagle's shoulders. So Eagle flew up, higher and higher. And higher still. Yet he too became exhausted before he reached the songs. Just as Eagle was about to come down in disgrace, Sparrow flew up from Eagle's shoulders and, before he got too tired, reached the place where the songs were. Then he brought them all down for the other birds, so each bird got its own song.

Moral: Biggest is not always best. The smallest birds have the most important messages.

IMAGES:



This Wood Frog was hanging out near the shore of one of the vernal ponds close to the trail. It was small enough to be a one year old juvenile and, in any case, probably a male. Notice how its colour enables it to blend in. This frog has an immense range, from Alabama north to Hudson Bay. It makes a quacking sound when breeding.



Our mother Raccoon for 2013 peers out of her doorway at the unwelcome intruder. She will probably bring her kits out later in the month. We use the annual succession of mothers to study Raccoon family life and behaviour. The 2x4 replaces a limb that broke away.