

Date and time: Sunday December 13 2015 12:55 - 4:25 pm.

Weather: Prec. 2 mm; RH 96%; BP 101.8; overcast/fog; calm; T 11°C

Activity: Walking the property with Darren Jacobs.

Pat and I arrived on site a half hour ahead of Darren Jacobs, our Steward from Moraviantown. It had been a foggy day up until then, albeit less so as we drove further south. At Newport Forest the fog had thinned to the barely visible haze over Fleming Creek seen below. Pat had remarked on the extended riffle at the second bend in this image. I thought about walking along the edge of the creek to visit the riffle and sample its bottom, but other duties intervened.



For one thing I had to take the weather, anticipating a healthy level in the site's rain gauge. What! Only 2 mm? It's been like this virtually all year. (See Phenology.)

Pat found a rotting log near the Nook, splitting it open to reveal dozens of small, all-black ants scurrying about a large mass of round white eggs, presumably not ant eggs. Were they "minding" the eggs of another insect? Ant behaviour can be bizarre, from minding aphid eggs, for example, to getting other ants to be slaves. Nearby we found a troop of ultra-tiny mushrooms with caps and stalks covered by an almost microscopic orange fuzz. This one certainly isn't in the guide books!

When Darren arrived we caught up on each other's news. Darren has been very

busy at Rondeau, “rolling the phrag,” as he calls it. There are some heavy growths of the invasive Phragmites plant at Rondeau and the management there wanted to burn it, but the plant is so tall and the patches so thick, the resulting fire burns far too hot, threatening nearby buildings. Darren showed them how, by rolling the phragmites under the wheels of his jeep, flattening it all out, the resulting fire burns slowly, safely, and more thoroughly.

Darren and I decided to walk to the river while Pat busied herself trying to catch some of the little black ants for a later portrait session. As we walked the river trail, Darren mentioned a friend of his who had devised an eagle feather trap. This consists of four strong 3’ sticks planted firmly in the corners of a 2.5’ x 2.5’ square. Then, about a foot above the ground, one lashes four cross-sticks to the corner posts, forming a square. A corduroy of sticks across the square frame completes the structure. For the final stage one places a dead fish, fresh or rotten, on top of the sticks, then waits for an eagle to discover it. (Eagles have cast-iron stomachs.)

The trap works as follows: “The eagle spots the fish bait and lands near the trap, looking carefully all around for enemies. Seeing none, it hops up on the sticks and takes the fish in its beak. In the act of flying off with the prize, the eagle’s enormous wings are sure to strike the sticks, possibly knocking off a loose feather or two. Darren’s friend got three beautiful flight feathers at one go in this manner.

At the river, we found the beach was half covered with water and too slippery to walk upon. We heard a tapping noise overhead. Looking around, Darren spotted a Hairy Woodpecker and photographed it through the telephoto lens of his camera. I looked through the drift pile near our feet, full of sticks and twigs brought by a flood. Among the debris, one can always find empty snail shells. On this occasion I spotted a Forest Snail (native - *Anguispira alternata*) among the drift.

On the way back we came upon a game trail that crossed the main trail, so we took the game trail instead. It led eventually to the opening of Blind Creek and, in its (empty) bed, we found a number of dead trees heavily invested with fungi, including a *Trametes* fungus and a multitude of small brackets called *Plicaturopsis crispa*. Along the creek bed we found scrapings where deer had been muzzling the ground to root out *delices de terre*, as it were, whatever that might be.

Back at camp, I learned that all the little black ants had disappeared and in her insect jar Pat had captured a Tarnished Plant Bug (*Lygus lineolaris*), one of the most common mirids in the area. She had also found what appeared to be an all-black beetle pupa. Presently Darren’s ears perked up. “I hear a kingfisher down at

the creek.” Then, “Yup. There it is.” One more for the day’s bird list. After a wrap-up in the Nook, we all left the property.

Feral Cats:

Trail cam, #1 at The Hole caught two feral cats passing through the pinch-point. Both have been recorded before. One is all black with white toes (“Blackie”) and one is a patchwork of black and white (“Patches”). Blackie passed at midnight of December 4 and Patches about 3 hours later. Pat thinks they’re hunting voles.

Birds: (7)

American Crow (FCF); American Robin (TR/N); Belted Kingfisher (FC); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Hairy Woodpecker (RL). (Again, none of our winter “regulars”, the White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped chickadee, Tufted Titmouse or Red-bellied Woodpecker.)

Phenology: American Robin still present on property. A preliminary precipitation summary for the year appears below:

year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
(mm)	667	1020	674	1227	926	744	1243	704	758	628*

The years 2004 - 2006 were collectively dry enough to be called a “drought” and it was during this period that we lost most of the Bitternuts, weakened by drying stress, then attacked by twig borers. “Crash, crash, crash.” Down they all came. In any case, Newport Forest has become exceptionally dry, thanks to three successive years of very low precipitation.**

* to date

**Winter snow is converted to liquid equivalent and added to the total.

Catching up:

Readers who would like to read any of the past 1009 issues of the *Bulletin* may visit the archive at <<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/>> and scroll to the bottom.

IMAGES:



Darren Jacobs is an excellent naturalist and photographer. Here he stands on the bed of Blind Creek looking “downstream”. In his hand he holds his favourite Nikon+monopod field camera. The extensible monopod imparts an element of steadiness to every shot.

Behind Darren’s head a thin mist hangs its curtain, remnant of the day’s fog.



Trametes gibbosa is a fairly common species of the large genus *Trametes*, named for its lumpy (gibbous = swelling) surface texture. *T. ochrea* is a close lookalike. The greenish areas in the centres of the brackets consist of algae. Like all fungi growing *on* wood, this one is also growing *in* wood; a vast network of mycelia inside this dead willow slowly digests the lignin, weakening the tree, ultimately to bring it crashing down. One of the caps has been inverted to show the pore surface on the underside.

Although many fungi resemble plants in their habits of growth and stationary nature, they have more in common with animals, taking in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide.