

ER #76 Fraser River – Oct 1, 2023

Location: islands in middle of Fraser River, near Chilliwack
Report by Bill & Bev Ramey

Sunshine, 13 to 21 degrees C, sunny, calm

Launch kayaks from Nicomen Island 10:30 am, return 4:00 pm

Walking distance: 9.5 km

Water level, Fraser River at Mission: 0.4 to 1.1 metres (tidal)

Water level, Fraser River at Hope: 3.3 metres

Participants: EcoReserve Wardens Bill & Bev Ramey, Senior Park Ranger Riley Kennedy and Auxiliary Park Ranger Rochelle Lascelle

It was a lovely sunny fall day to explore the islands. We walked around the islands, first upriver to the NE tip and then SW downriver, checked out the inner pond, still with water, then continued further SW through main swale of lower two islands. Along that southeast-facing eroding shoreline, extensive gravel bars stretch out to the main channel of the Fraser. What had been pools over the past several years between the two lower islands has now filled in during past freshets with fine sediments and colonizing plant growth. A few of these species are invasive (see listing at end).

Visible signs of human activity were minimal: no old camp fires were seen, nor garbage, no wheeled tracks from fixed winged aircraft were seen, nor landing signs from helicopters

The number of spawning Pink Salmon was stunningly large. Many fish carcasses lined the shorelines and there was also many live Pinks visibly spawning just out from the shoreline. It was also nice to see the many small Western Toads. We counted 14 young toads during our walk about, as well as one mid-sized and one full-sized toad.

Wildlife Observations

Mammals

Beavers active only in one location on the upper south-facing island where there were visible trails to cut small trees and a hole in the bank

Deer tracks were extensive, including small-sized tracks, likely fawns

Coyote tracks and scat

Black bear tracks, large and small, likely from bears that occasionally swim the river channels

Seal swimming in Fraser channel on Nicomen Island side

Amphibians

Western Toads 16 observed: 14 of these small, one mid-sized and one full-sized
Tree Frog heard calling near boat launch on Nicomen Island

Fish

Several hundred Pink Salmon carcasses lined the shorelines and at least a hundred Pinks spawning, with redds showing near the shoreline, especially along the southeast-facing shorelines

Several small fish seen in shallow inner pools

Mollusc

Shell of Western River Pearl Mussel found (GPS WGS84 49.18348, -122.00171).

This shell was found at the upper tip of the islands, so likely it had floated down the Fraser from a location higher up.

Brown-lipped snail (*Cepaea nemoralis*), an introduced species observed in several locations.

Insects (beetles, dragonflies, grasshoppers)

Shadow Dancer Dragonfly (*Aeshna umbrosa*) were common.

Carolina grasshopper (*Dissosteira carolina*) were common on open sandy areas.

Grasshopper sp. (*Melanopus sp.*)

Lucerne Moth (*Nomophila nearctica*)

Numerous blue-green leaf-eating beetles were feeding on willow leaves and mating; these beetles had previously been observed April 24, 2018.

Birds

Entered on eBird at <https://ebird.org/canada/hotspot/L844938>

Common Merganser 3

Glaucous-winged Gull 330 (likely attracted by many Pink Salmon carcasses)

Great Blue Heron 3

Bald Eagle 1 immature and 4 adults, seen flying overhead at different times, but may have been some duplication

Belted Kingfisher 1

American Crow 1 heard calling

Song Sparrow 1

Lincoln's Sparrow 2

And observed at nearby Nicomen Island boat launch

Downy Woodpecker 1

Ruby-crowned Kinglet 6

Golden-crowned Kinglet 2

Dark-eyed Junco 2

Song Sparrow 1

Golden-crowned Sparrow 2

Spotted Towhee 1

Herbaceous plants

Invasive Species colonizing on the gravel/sand bars:

Polygonum aviculare Prostrate (or Common) Knotweed

Salsola tragus Prickly Russian Thistle

Persicaria maculosa Spotted Lady's Thumb

Dysphania botrys Jerusalem-oak

Melilotus albus White Sweetclover

Native Species:

Xanthium strumarium Common Cocklebur

Solidago lepida Elegant Goldenrod

Symphotrichum subspicatum Douglas Aster

Water plant: possibly *Chara sp.* (muskgrass) in interior pond



Young Western Toad, fourteen of these young were seen during the day.

Photo: Rochelle Lascelle



Colonizing plant. *Xanthium strumarium* Common Cocklebur, a native plant.



Pink Salmon spawning



Hundreds of Pink Salmon carcasses lined the shoreline



Another colonizing plant, *Dysphania botrys* Jerusalem-oak. This plant is not native.



Looking downriver from accreting shoreline, showing colonizing plants; most prolific here is *Dysphania botrys* (Jerusalem-oak)



Walking through willows on one of the vegetated islands.
Photo: Rochelle Lascelle



Carolina Grasshopper (*Dissosteira carolina*)



Grasshopper (*Melanopus sp.*)



Shadow Darner Dragonfly (*Aeshna umbrosa*)



Leaf-eating beetles were abundant on young willow.