

Newport Forest

December 20 2000

2:30 - 4:15 pm

Weather: cold -5C, sunny, no breeze

Purpose: to visit the trailer and check for birds at the new feeders.

Participants: Pat, Kee

Before going into the property, we saw Eva's car as we passed the junction of the Beattie Line with Furnival Road. She was off in her acreage, burning scraps and refuse. We stopped as she was walking out toward her car. Pat left the van to go and greet her. We expected Eva to unlock the gate but she climbed nimbly over the fence, Pat making a face of astonishment as she did so. Eva was looking forward to having us over later.

We stopped at Harvey's to drop off a fruit-basket, then proceeded to the Hurdles where we dropped off a second basket and stayed to visit for about half an hour. Nina fed us some shavings from her roast venison, Pat accepting a few pieces with a certain reluctance, but being a good sport. She agreed with Nina, in the end, that the meat had a flavour somewhat like spiced beef. Nina showed us a book she had recently purchased from Ken Willis, the author, in Wardsville. (519) 693-4992. The book is about the history of Wardsville.

We drove the van to the crest of the last hill before the lower meadow. I had done this to humour Pat but when I saw how chewed-up the track was by our recent getting-stuck fiasco, I was glad we left the van where it was. There were ruts deep enough to mire it, even with snow-tires. The trailer was much to Pat's liking and we sat at the "kitchen" table, drawing up a list of first things: kerosene lamp, dog biscuits, newspapers, tin for birdseed, garbage pail, lots of suet, raisins, etc.

The fact was that both feeders that were put up during the last visit were now in full service. At the near feeder, attached to a large Shagbark Hickory just outside the kitchen window, we saw two or more White-breasted nuthatches, one Red-breasted Nuthatch, a Junco, and two Red-bellied Woodpeckers! Pat saw the latter birds best, thrilled with the brilliant red heads and laddered backs. We also saw crows flying over the property.

I went down to look at Fleming's Creek and discovered a young raccoon who seemed marooned in a tree that grew out of the creek ice that formed on the floodwaters over the lower bank. On the upper bank above the base of this tree, a large dog or coyote (maybe the "wolf" that Darren swears was seen nearby recently) had been excavating a burrow. there was dirt everywhere, hurled out

onto the ice and scattered all over the bank. Had the raccoon been sleeping in the burrow, only to be rudely awakened by the predator? Had it somehow escaped to the tree? There was a story here, but we couldn't be sure what, exactly had gone on. The raccoon seemed rather torpid. I felt sorry for it, nestled into a small crotch of the spindly tree, not the kind of tree one would choose for a good sunning, I thought. Anyway, we left a plentiful supply of DBs, hoping that the large canid did not return too soon -- to finish off the raccoon or the DBs. I took a picture of the raccoon.

Everything was frozen. The creek had frozen over and inside the trailer the water-jugs had also frozen. Tea would not be possible unless we melted some snow, as my father used to do.

Time was getting on, so we walked up to the van and drove out. The next stop was Eva Newport's, where we had a nice visit. Eva served several kinds of cookie, lots of cheese and crackers, tea and coffee. She seemed to enjoy our chat. We gave her a special basket which Pat had prepared and Eva, in turn, gave us a shiny red shopping bag with some presents and a card in it.

Species seen:

Red-bellied Woodpecker
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
Slate-gray Junco
American Crow
Raccoon