

Newport Forest

February 25 2001

2:00- 5:15 pm

Weather: very windy, gusting to 60 kmh, mixed sun/cloud, 11C

Purpose: to pull deer out of river, walk new trail, scan for wildlife

Participants: Kee, Nic, Darren, Robert Hopkins

As we were opening the gate, Darren drove up with a friend, Robert Hopkins, who lives in Windsor. We drove down to the trailer and parked. While Nic refilled the feeders, Darren mentioned that he had photographed a flock of about 20 Wild Turkeys about 3 km west on the Fleming Line.

We went down to the creek, seeing that it was well up with the recent rains and warmer temperatures, the depth now about 2 metres. The deer was almost completely submerged, with just the tip of one antler and the rump showing above the water. I had chest waders on and attempted a crossing at the shallowest spot. Before I even got to the gravel bed, the water was up within a few inches of the top of the waders so, with a rope from Darren, I made my way out again.

Back at the trailer, I switched back to my regular footgear and we decided to go down to the river, then across to the mouth of the creek. Along the edge of Harvey's Bean Field, Darren found a small number of darkish owl pellets, which I collected for Pat. It was something of a mystery how they got there because the location was nowhere near a tree. They looked about the size that a Screech Owl would make.

At the river, we saw that it was well up but still well below the landing. I took a picture of a very white Sycamore upriver and we proceeded along a game trail, passing a small hollow filled with water. It reminded Nic and me of a kettle pond and we wondered whether some of the hollows in the area might have been made by ice blocks as the glaciers went out. The downed tree still straddled the mouth of the creek and Nick demonstrated the feasibility of crossing (which I photographed). We all followed and began to walk along the east bank. We stopped when Darren thought he saw a Brown Creeper. But it turned out to be a White-breasted Nuthatch. There were also several Chickadees about. The woods generally were free of snow except here and there a few remnant ice sheets from the great flood decorated little hollows.

We then came to an old Cottonwood (?) snag about 20 metres in from the creek. It measured 3.145 metres in girth, which works out to just a tad over one metre dbh. (took photo) It had many holes in it and was sure to be the home of at least a

few birds and mammals, but rapping on the trunk produced no action. About 100 m from the mouth of the creek we came upon a perfect new potential bridge. An Ash had fallen right across the creek to join the east bank with a point on the west bank where the creek bent sharply around, a sort of peninsula. As we continued on, more or less following the creek, a dark shape flew along the creek almost behind us. Darren and I both saw it, but Darren saw it first, saying it looked more like an owl than anything else. We approached a large hollow where much of the recent rain had collected, forming a sizable pond, another possible kettle, we thought, as it had very round sides. It drained by a little stream into Fleming's Creek. Nearby, we found a triple Sycamore, one trunk leaning at a very shallow angle that you could almost walk along upright. The biggest trunk measured 4.25 m circumference, yielding 1.35 m dbh.

Somewhere in the vicinity, Darren found a new kind of gall that looked somewhat like the cap of an acorn, but completely closed over. He donated it to our gall collection. Further along the creek, I spotted some large, shelving mushrooms growing on an Elm that leaned out over the creek somewhat. Nic kindly retrieved some specimens. We came to a place where the creek bent northward around another peninsula and here Darren showed us the tree where he had seen the flying squirrel when he had visited the area a few years ago. We passed two of the Bur Oaks that Nic and I planted last spring. One seemed intact, albeit leaning a little, the other had snapped off in the heavy flooding, perhaps struck by some floating debris.

By this point, we were almost opposite the trailer on the other side of the creek and we could hear some Blue Jays calling. Then I heard a Red-bellied Woodpecker. We were almost up to the submerged deer, when Darren saw a large owl fly in to perch in a tree directly across the creek. We all watched it as it watched us. But by the time we got our cameras out, it flew off. Judging from the large size and large ear tufts, it would have to be a Great Horned Owl.

The deer was a bit tricky to pull out of the creek. Nic, anchored by a rope held by Darren and Bob, leaned precariously out over one of the antlers and after a few unsuccessful tries, lassoed it. It was then relatively easy to pull the deer out. Darren inspected it, stating that it was not a young buck and a good size. He could see no bullet holes but mentioned that sometimes you couldn't see them under the fur. He demonstrated how the fur would come off easily with a stick. "To get the fur off a hide, you just soak it in water." We then discussed the use of boiled deer brains and water softener to cure hides. "There's just enough brain in one deer to treat one hide."

We tied the deer to a nearby tree so it wouldn't float away if there was a new flood. We then proceeded along the trail that Nic and I had mapped two weeks ago in half a foot of snow. We came to Harvey's Woods, where I showed Darren and Bob the many large Beeches that formed the core of this older forest. Darren then spotted some large galls growing on what looked like a Walnut. Some had fallen. They resemble Black Knot, except they are much larger, brown, and very warty.

We climbed the terrace between Harvey's property and Eva's. Coming down on the other side, Nic spotted the largest Artist's Conk polypore I have ever seen, about the size of a toilet seat cover. Nic demonstrated the strength of the shelf by sitting on it and relaxing. I showed Bob why it was called "Artist's Conk." When he drew a fingernail across the under surface, the line instantly turned black, as though drawn by a pen.

We came again to the fallen ash. Nic crossed it while we held out breath. Then Darren crossed it. Bob and I were so tired from holding our breath, that we decided to return as we had come, by the "bridge" at the creek mouth. We rejoined Darren and Nic on the other side of the creek and made our way back to the trailer. As we were crossing the Lower Meadow, Darren and I both spotted the Meadow Vole simultaneously. It was using its runways, trying to flee us, but one of us would block the creature and it would reverse and run the other way, as if confined to the passage. Darren trapped it beneath the edge of his boot and I took a picture of it, before he let it scamper off, unharmed. Back in the trailer, we had soft drinks and burgers, while the trailer shook in the wind. Then it was time for everyone to leave. We did.

Birds:

Chickadees (about 6); White-breasted Nuthatch (1); Great Horned Owl (1), Blue Jays (2-3), Red-bellied Woodpecker (1).

New Species:

Oyster Mushroom (B 291, L 793, P 206)	<i>Pleurotes ostreatus</i>	Eva's Woods
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False Turkey-tail (B 154, L 497, P 270)	<i>Stereum ostrea</i>	Harvey's Woods
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Pictures from Darren: