

**Newport Forest**

Tuesday October 31

2:15 - 4:00 pm

**Weather:** prec. 0mm; RH 81%; ovcast; SW 0-10kmh; LM 16C; FCF 16C

**Purpose:** 2-day stay

**Participants:** Pat, Kee

Arriving at the gate, we noticed a TV picking at something up the road past the Hurdle's, so we drove ahead to investigate. It was a young raccoon with Thelma's characteristics. (See report, later) This is one argument for rehabbers not to get too attached to their charges.

The Thames River is once again over it's banks and Fleming Creek is several cm over the bridge decking. (for the third time this month!)

We heard several gunshots in the near distance, so I took the van out on the road to investigate, following a pickup down the Fleming Line, then Furnival, then Gibb (toward Morrison). The two hunters in the truck disavowed any knowledge of the shots, claiming that they did their hunting behind Van Bommel's.

We went up to the water tank, to follow the game trail I had noticed there a few weeks ago. It led across to the East Ravine, along the ravine toward the road, then out of the ravine, through the fence and down to the road, a mere 10m from where "Thelma" lay. I picked up the trail across the road and followed it into a bean field belonging to the Hurdle's (see report). I left some kibble on the game trail by the water tank.

After supper we heard Coyotes calling, then a scream that we had never heard before. We guessed everything from a rutting Buck to a Cougar, without becoming wiser. After dark we spotted a SFS on the Hickory feeder. At around 10pm I took a walk around the TRT, falling only once as I stepped over a branch across the trail. No fungi to speak of, but a wonderful vision to see the woods in bright moonlight, with many shadows and no leaves. After a brief rest in the trailer, I walked up to the TS to find the kibble still uneaten. The air temperature fell to 0C and remained there all night. No owls called.

By morning Fleming Creek had fallen somewhat below the bridge as floodwaters subsided on the Thames. The clay beach has been under water nearly all month! Pat had a very successful morning birding. (See "birds.") In the early afternoon we took a walk into the RSF, me loaded with tools and stakes. On our way into the RSF, on the river bluffs, we started up a Ruffed Grouse, our first in a long

time. Then, in the RSF itself, we started up a Cottontail that dashed off through the woods. We resprayed and relabeled all the plot stakes from #1 to #8, finding one missing entirely (#7). We had to use some elementary surveying techniques to locate the approximate position of the old stake and drive a new one. As we rested near #7, I spied a wonderful old snag, hollow inside. I knocked, but no one appeared. Good spot for Sonny, we thought.

Later that afternoon, I explored the other end of the TS game trail, tracing it down to the creek and off through the GF. (see Raccoon Report) I made my way back to camp, stopping at the old hollow log (to which I had introduced the girls early on) and cleaned it out, placing a little care package of kibble & crackers inside.

### **Birds:** (22)

American Crow (UM); American Goldfinch (LM); American Robin (HBF); Bald Eagle (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Brown Creeper (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Cedar Waxwing (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Dark-eyed Junco (tr); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Field Sparrow (UM); Gold-crowned Kinglet (GF/FC); Mourning Dove (UM); Northern Cardinal (ET); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Ruffed Grouse (RB); Song Sparrow (ET); Tufted Titmouse (ET); Turkey Vulture (FL); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); White-throated Sparrow (LM)

### **New species:** (Malaise)

Digger Bee	[ <i>Anthophora</i> sp.]	LM nz/KD J118/05
Paper Wasp	<i>Polistes fuscata</i>	LM nz/KD J118/05
Black Honey Bee	<i>Apis milifera melifera</i>	LM nz/KD J116/05

### **Raccoon Report**

The girls were born on or about April 2/06, were removed from a temporary den on April 16, and remained with us, through weaning and teething, until late July. They then went through a “gradual” release, as follows:

July 29-30: girls did not return with us (gone from 4:30 to 10pm on 29th)  
July 31: picked girls up  
August 5-6: 2-day visit, took girls home (Louise didn't want to leave.)  
August 9: girls did not return with us, remaining on site  
October 1: last contact with girls

From July 29 to August 9, the girls spent a day and a night at Newport. (On July 29, they spent 5.5 hours away from camp.) From August 9 until our last contact with them on October 1 they had spent 53 days on the property continuously and 54 days in total.

On October 1, Thelma appeared to be in good health, but Louise had a large cyst or abscess on her left fore paw. Apart from their steadily increasing abilities and familiarity with the landscape, three incidents stand out as somehow relevant in the light of later events.

1. On August 5, when we brought the girls back to London for the last time, Louise scratched and whined at the van door as we left, clearly wanting to be let out.

2. On August 9 (final release date), the girls followed me up to the gate when I closed it. We stopped at the water tank, which seemed to interest them greatly. Continuing back to the trailer, they ran ahead of me to the beginning of the Gallery Forest and broke trail into the trees with a clear sense of intention, as if they had a place in mind. They did not show up again until 3am in the morning, smelling as if they had been at the creek - or in a swampy or moldy place.

3. 1. On October 1, I took them across the pipe bridge down to the bird-watching bench, where we rested. We returned via the log bridge.

They had been familiar with the pipe bridge from the very beginning of their visits to Newport Forest. They had known about the log bridge since J121, when I first took them along the Two-bridge Trail. We walked that trail once again on August 5 and one more time on October 1. Thus they were aware of the position of the log bridge in relation to the pipe bridge and that there were two places where they could cross the creek. The creek had flooded over the pipe bridge three times during the critical period from Oct. 1 to this date: Oct. 4 (deck replaced Oct. 12), October 20 (deck replaced Oct. 25), and Oct. 29 (deck partially replaced Nov. 1)

On October 12th I noticed a new game trail leading past the water tank in the UM. (unrecorded in field notes). It appeared to be well used. We mapped it during the present visit:

\_\_\_\_\_ well used  
..... less so

“Thelma” was found on the west side of the road 10m from the point where the trail crossed Fleming Line. A walk through the field to which the trail led revealed a recently harvested bean field, with lots of gleanings still on the ground. I found raccoon tracks, primarily those of young raccoons, both within the field and all the way along the east side of the field to the edge of Hurdles’s bush, just behind the field. It would seem likely that the girls (or at least “Thelma”) had been using that trail to forage in the bean field.

## Theory

Assuming that it was Thelma that we found beside the road, one might conjecture the following events:

Some time in September (but possibly as early as July 29) the girls discovered one or more den sites in the vicinity of Fleming Creek. Exploring beyond the property, they discovered the bean field and began to visit it nightly (more or less) from the time of the discovery until the end of October. Thelma had less body fat at the time of her demise than when I had last seen her, indicating that the bean field was not sustaining them fully, but gave them a subsistence diet.

If they had visited one of the den sites as early as August 9, it might explain the musty smell on their coats when they showed up after an 8- hour absence from camp on that date. One of the den sites may have been on the Fleming Creek flood plain. Louise may have died from her abscess or she may have recovered and is still in the area. In any case, by August 9th, if not earlier, they were aware of the trail that led past the water tank - assuming that it already existed.

The flooding on the property was confined strictly to the creek, which never broke its relatively high banks. If the girls had a tree on the flood plain, they still had full access to the west side of the creek via the log bridge.

We called them on every visit to the property from Oct. 5 to Oct. 31. The possibilities are:

1. They were out of earshot. This would place their den site consistently at (roughly) 500m or more away.
2. They heard us from a den site closer than this, but were tired and disinclined to visit.
3. They heard us and were inclined to visit, but were constrained by an unknown physical or psychological factor (“territory”?) from visiting.

It would seem likely that the girls shifted their operational hours from a mixed nocturnal/diurnal schedule to a strictly nocturnal one sometime during October. Although it is possible that they denned in another area (on site) altogether, we will take the game trail as evidence of a Fleming Creek (or flood plain) lodgment.