

Newport Forest Saturday January 27 2007

2:15 -0 4:30 pm

Weather: prec. 5mm; RH n/r; calm; ovcst; LM -1C; GF -1C

Purpose: tracking

Participants: Kee

Never have I seen four Northern Harriers in a row . One soared over Betty Purcells old field as I came in, the other three were hunting in the UM. Two sat in a tree watching a third soaring over the east ravine, probably looking for Meadow Voles. After setting up camp, I surveyed the road around the trailer, noting a skunk track from under the deck that headed up the road, where I also found tracks of a large buck Virginia Deer emerging from the GF to cross the LM. Further down, an Eastern Cottontail had loped from the BCF across the Lm and on into the GF. A White-footed Mouse had foraged near the table in the Nook and an Eastern Grey Squirrel had come up the trail from the creek, then headed under the Black Maple.

Apparently, Striped Skunks will double-register alone or in pairs. A double-registered (two-skunk) trail left the BCF, followed the road toward the trailer, splitting into two at the entrance to HBF. The beanfield trail meandered a bit, apparently returned, then split into two! Were there three skunks using the same trail or did one skunk walk it three times? (the latter seems unlikely) Great Mysteries attend the Art of Tracking ! The other trail also split likewise and I was tempted to believe that at least four of Christine's little charges had made it this far into 2007. And hardly "little" now. The tracks had the max dimensions in the field guide.

I went down the FCT as far as the old hollow log. There were no tracks in or around it and I was led to believe that it was not in use. A doe had used part of the FCT, as well as a squirrel, a skunk, and a mouse. I saw no raccoon tracks anywhere in the vicinity of the trailer, lower meadow or FCT.

I set out for the TRT by backtracking the skunk troop. The trail emerged not from the BCF, but from the forest strip that connects the BCF to Eva's Woods. (EW) Were they living over there somewhere? There were few tracks along ET until I got to the RL, where a coyote had traveled downriver quite recently (<24hr). I followed it up into the bluffs as far as the bench, where the trail was lost in a Wild Turkey stomping ground. (Pat thinks there must be lots of acorns up there from the few mature oaks along the trail.)

I watched the Thames roll past for a minute: rounded ice cakes, the product of many collisions, flowed by, occasionally nudging the shore ice, now rotting. Fleming Creek remains high like the Thames, and also has shore ice. Paddling up toward the bend, a pair of Buffleheads dodged the cakes.

Continuing along the bluffs segment of the TRT, the first raccoon tracks of the day came scrambling up from the river, onto the trail, and around the bend. The tracks remained ahead of me on the trail for about 20m, then veered off, only to return about 30m later. It followed every twist and turn of the path as it meanders up into the Old Forest section (recently added to the trail). Here, a second set of tracks came in from the left (HB) and joining up with the first set. Then one set led off toward the river, taking me to a large jumble of logs and river-trees that I had never actually LOOKED AT before. The other set veered off the trail later on toward the river, then back up toward the jumble.

Two of the massive trunks appeared to be hollow. The tracks led under the jumble and disappeared. As I walked around the jumble, I spotted several more raccoon tracks coming and going. One of these went down to the river for a drink, then returned, the animal having heaved itself up over a ledge by sinking its claws in very deeply. I left a few little piles of cat chow to help the critter(s) along. The tracks were adult size.

Walking only another 100 or so metres along the RSF before returning, I came across the tracks of a subadult (or female?) raccoon coming out of the forest, following the trail for about 50m before veering off toward the river. It was now time to leave.

Birds: (9)

Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Bufflehead (TR); Canada Goose (BCF); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Harrier (UM); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (RB)

Mammals: (6) Coyote (RB); Eastern Cottontail (LM); Eastern Gray Squirrel (GF); Raccoon (RSF); Virginia Deer (GF); White-footed Mouse (Tr)

New species: Malaise Samples

Pale-banded Dart	<i>Euxoa badinodis</i>	RL nz/KD Au11/05
Lettered Habrosyne (Thyatridae)	<i>Habrosyne scripta</i> (uncommon)	RL nz/KD Au11/05