

Saturday Site Visit

Newport Forest Saturday March 14 2009 1:50 - 4:50 pm

weather: prec. 37 mm; RH 72%; BP 99.7 kPa; calm; clr, T 11° C
purpose: maintenance/trails
participants: Kee, Brian

The ground seemed to be still frozen at the gate, so we made bold to drive in. Only when we got to the bottomland did we discover that the ground there had already thawed to depth. (We discovered that when we drove a stake to anchor the weather station stand.) The river is in a minor flood, being up only to the foot of the bluffs; Fleming Creek is partly over its banks, spilling into the FCF.

I made a quick tour of the Regeneration Zone (RZ) in the Lower Meadow (LM), dismayed to see the deer damage. Trees that I had placed bud protectors on remained undamaged, of course, but last fall I just kept putting off the onerous chore of adding the protectors, completing only perhaps 20 % of the trees. The damage will set the planting program back the better part of a year. (And I share the blame with the deer.)

We put out bird seed, had a quick water break, then headed into the Blind Creek Forest carrying various implements of mass destruction -- to do battle with the fallen bitternuts. Every year I visit this wood, it seems more desolate and ragged than the year before, thanks to Mr Scolytus. I begged Brian to use our new Armstrong power saw, the one with fixed, non-revolving teeth, but he preferred to use the axe on any trunks that we could not simply bull off the trail,

We cleared another 100 m of trail, but encountered two deadfalls (what they call "jackpots" up north in the logging business) blocking the trail. We bulled two 300-lb logs off the trail, cut others, and cleared the first deadfall. We left the second for the next visit. Everywhere the floor of the forest was coated with an inch or more of clay slime from the last flood. While Brian cleaned up the tools, I went out to the river to check, starting up a flock of 46 Mallards, but leaving two Canada Geese to paddle placidly downstream.

river up to foot of river landing (RL) [zoom on far side of river to see Mallards in flight]

Coming out, I tended the two remaining (functional) trail cams. Number One took no pictures at all, apparently having spotted no inspiring subjects. Cam #2 took 35 pictures, all of them of its new scene by the bench in the BCF. Nothing of interest.

Back at the camp, Brian said, "Hey, there's this red squirrel at the feeder!" He was right, more properly a Red Squirrel, aka Chickaree aka *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*. Although Pat had seen five of these over the last 8-9 years, I had only seen one, and it had been moving very fast. This one sat quietly at the tray feeder, letting me examine it closely through binos, but not letting me get close with my camera before it would dart up the trunk. So I had to use the zoom. As everyone knows by now, I'm no nature photographer.

Getting off the property was a spine-chilling, gut-wrenching, mud-spraying affair, careening in part, through the meadows to stay off a sinking track, finally making it up to the gate without plunging down the creek bluffs or crashing into the tree station. "Man," said Brian, "You one mad mud-runna!" I took that as a compliment. Pat took it as further evidence of being trapped in a male body. "I'm not going down 'til that ground is dry."

birds: (11)

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Hairy Woodpecker (GF); Mallard (TR); Mourning Dove (Tr); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-winged Blackbird (RL); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



Red Squirrel at tray feeder Note: Although it superficially resembles some Eastern Gray Squirrels with reddish fur (common in London's Old South), the Red Squirrel is distinctly shorter and more slender, with a more rapid climbing style. It has the same white underparts as the EGS (but more extensive) and the same white spectacles. It is distinguished primarily by a broad band of light-reddish fur that runs down the head, back, and tail in one broad, continuous and diffuse band. It develops dark ear-tufts during the cold months, but loses them around this time of year. Red Squirrels commonly prefer coniferous situations and ours are probably out-foraging from Janik's pine plantation on the next property.

(click on image to enlarge)



flood jetsam: one car tire on rim, one wine bottle with cap (nothing in it but "spit," according to Brian) Note: It was wonderful to hear the Red-wing Blackbird sing by the river. It recalls its Delaware name: "Chok(e)-wa-leeesh" "Spring is coming!"