

## Visit to Newport Forest

Newport Forest Saturday January 16 2010 1:40 - 4:35 pm

weather: prec. 6 mm; RH 78%; BP 99.3 kPa; ovcast; calm; T 0° C  
purpose: tracking & birdwatching  
participants: Pat, Kee

The drive-in was uneventful thanks to the modest snowpack (average 6.5 cm with a thin melt-crust). We set out the birds seed, deer corn and mammal kibble, then settled down to our respective roles for the day. After two short excursions dictated by her condition, Pat settled down to passive birding from the trailer as a blind. Here she spotted two Tufted Titmice (calling to each other) and a Brown Creeper, our “best birds” of the day. On her excursion up the road toward the Upper Meadow (UM) she saw several crows mobbing a very large bird over the UM. The bird (quite possibly a Great Horned Owl) settled in a distant (ab. 300 m away) tree while the crows dive bombed it by turns.

For my part, I spotted a large Accipiter that, when I described it to Pat, she ID'd tentatively as a Northern Harrier. (not an accipiter but with a similar profile) I walked the TRT in the usual counter-clockwise direction (it has certain advantages) starting at the River and heading over the bluffs & so on. All along the trail there were plentiful tracks of mammals and birds brought out by the recent “warm spell.”

tracks: Coyote: Eastern Cottontail; Eastern Gray Squirrel; Meadow Vole; Raccoon; White-tailed Deer; Wild Turkey

(I also thought we had a Striped Skunk (rare on the property), but changed my opinion after a close examination of the tracks. Prints left by young raccoons can have a convergent toe profile, as well, but toes are too long for those of a skunk.)

The rest of the walk, though healthy, was uneventful except for the discovery of another Pileated “dig,” this one in the BCF, right beside the trail (see IMAGES below.)

After lunch in the trailer, Pat continued her birdwatching while I started the day's tracking exercises: #1 Where do Two-stripe's kits den? We knew they lived near the trailer, but weren't sure where. I counted entrance tracks (2) and emergent tracks (1) around the trailer perimeter and said “hmmm” to myself. #2 to follow a typical raccoon foraging trail. (they're never typical) I chose a set that led down the creek bluffs. This was a mistake because I ended up in a jackpot of downed Bitternuts that caused me to climb, scramble, fall and puff a lot, nearly ending with a slide into the creek below. I made my way crossland to the rapids where it was safe to descend, having noted that the tracks I was following led across the creek ice to the other side. I crossed the (open) rapids in my boots (no soakers), arriving at the other side to take up the trail again. I found it easily, noting two brief excursions into the creek forest that quickly returned to the bank. It then wandered out into the ice right to the edge, where the tracks disappeared into the shallow, open rapids of the creek. When I looked around, I saw other disappearing and appearing tracks with no way to tell which was which. I gave up and returned to base.

Pat described a possible wildlife adventure in track form seen during an earlier excursion. She spotted some Wild Turkey tracks, with those of a coyote along side. The turkey tracks ended with a tail-print, meaning it had taken off. Had the coyote been chasing/stalking it?

birds: (10)

American Crow (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Brown Creeper (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Hairy Woodpecker (Tr); Pileated Woodpecker (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (ET) [note our specialty in woodpeckers post-dieback of Bitternuts]

supplemental possibles: Great Horned Owl (UM); Northern Harrier (BCF)

new species:

'Black-tied Sexton' *Nicrophora americana* NF SM J130/09  
(still processing the Marshall data)

### IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



'Black-tied Sexton' (*Nicrophora americana*) belongs to the family of burying beetles or sexton beetles. We have watched one of these beetles actually cart a dead mouse off into the woods in order to bury the corpse and then to lay its eggs on the corpse. The mouse (with the beetle beneath) appears to be inching along by itself in a ghostlike manner. photo courtesy of Steve Marshall -- on site

(click on image to enlarge)



Coyote print (fore paw) is at upper limit of width, indicating a “senior” animal; most prints we see run 2 1/4” or slightly less. note X-shaped pattern between outer toes and palm, typical of Canid tracks, but not those of Felids.

(click on image to enlarge)



Eastern Gray Squirrel tends to leave paired tracks, owing to its habit of hopping; hind paws land in front of fore paws. (left forepaw a bit filled in)

(click on image to enlarge)



Pileated Woodpecker “dig” on side of Bitternut (last 24 hours)  
When they're after insects, they don't fool around!