

## A Saturday Visit

Newport Forest Saturday January 23 2010 2:20 - 5:10 pm

weather: prec. omm; RH 74%; BP 98.9 kPa; ovcast; calm; T +1° C  
purpose: tracking  
participants: Kee

South of the "streamer belt" that afflicts London with occasional dumpings of Lake Huron water in the form of snow squalls, there is very little snow anywhere. No precipitation has fallen on the property for a week and the average snow depth has declined slightly to 5.5 cm. This is a worrisome trend, with little precipitation in the last two months of '09 and very little in '10 so far. Based on our experience of the relationship between winter snowfall and overall precipitation, it looks like we're setting up for a return of the 20-year drought that we've been experiencing -- and which very few people are aware is ongoing. At such times (10 out of the last 15 years) there is a 20-40% shortfall in precipitation relative to the average annual. So, we may spend much of the coming warm seasons watering trees! (again) (On the bright side, we expect no major floods in the next few months.) drought is implicated in the drying of the BCF swamp and the collapse of four giant Black Willows (x) over the last 6 years, not to mention the Scolytus epidemic\* that cleaned out about 100 mature Bitternuts.

After setting out the bird & deer food, I took the Thames River trail (TRT) for a property survey and to see what tracks might be about. In fact, I felt little ambition to go off trail, so did very little following, just ID and noting numbers, etc. All the usual suspects had been out over the last week, leaving most of the TRT covered with numerous tracks of Wild Turkey, deer, raccoons, and occasional squirrels. (haven't seem weasel/ermine tracks for several years now)

Deer are, if anything, more abundant on the property than ever. They love the TRT and follow it faithfully for 2-400 m at a stretch, taking every twist & turn. At the same time two of their major game trails cross our trail, like the intersection of two highways. When many deer follow a trail of any kind in the winter, they invariably leave the ground chewed up pretty thoroughly wherever there is ground water near the surface.

The river & creek are much as they were last saturday, with some leads closing slightly. Leaving the property, I spotted five deer out in Ruth-Ann's field.

\*no moisture means trees cannot recruit their natural antibiotics to ward off fungal & insect attacks.

birds: (7)

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Common Flicker (GF/S); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

Cam Notes: The time feature on the "Stealth Cam" is very useful. We have shots of Two-stripe's kits visiting the camera area, drawn by bait, last saturday night at 9:05 and Sunday night at 8:37. This gives us an idea of their foraging time under the conditions that prevailed at the times. Some beautiful deer & Wild Turkey pics also happened over the week.

new species:

'Diamond-backed Spittlebug' Lepryonia quadrangularis NF SM J130/09  
Two-spotted Tree Cricket Neoxabea bipunctata NF SM J130/09  
thick-headed fly Zodion sp NF SM J130/09

## IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)



This young male Redbelly was there before I even got the birdseed out. (zoom didn't take me far enough)

(click on image to enlarge)



The alert naturalist will note tracks of Wild Turkey & White-tailed deer in this melange. Note rounded surfaces of older tracks.

(click on image to enlarge)



A major deer trail crosses the BCT (Blind Creek segment of the TRT). Note dark appearance caused by chewed-up ground.

(click on image to enlarge)



Stealth Cam 01/17/2010 19:37:22 27F

Two-stripe's kits are still around -- thanks in part to our baiting the trail can area. Note use of headlights to enhance night vision! Sleeping together, they save a LOT on heating bills, so to speak. We'll see you in the spring!