

Newport Forest

Thursday December 30 2010

2:15 - 5:05 pm

**Weather:** precip. 1 mm; RH 93%; BP 101.7 kPa; ovcast; calm; T +4° C

**Purpose:** tracking in snow

**Participants:** Kee

I used the garboggan\* to bring in the supplies for the trailer, noting two principal deer crossings in the Upper Meadow as I went. There were tracks of five or six individual deer there. Further down, toward the Lower Meadow, I encountered several more sets, along with tracks of a Wild Turkey and, closer to the trailer, those of a lone Eastern Cottontail. The snow was not much good for tracking today because a) it was still deep enough to make walking an energy-consuming exercise for the animals (and me), so there were fewer out and b) the prints were deep and filled in too readily.

Judging from the snowpail reading, we had less than 1 cm of snow since the last visit. I put out winter rations for the birds. At first there were none, but the Chickadees spread the word and within a half hour there was a not-atypical gang hanging around in the bushes and trees near the trailer.

I set up the new game camera, blinding myself in the process by forgetting to turn off the flash during installation. I am looking into a second, somewhat fancier device that transmits pictures via a built-in cellphone. (more to come)

The river, previously an unmoving jumble of ice-cakes has broken up somewhat, with clear water between cakes, but still unmoving. Go figure. I walked down to the creek, finding open leads at both the Upper and Lower Rapids. On the trail to the creek I encountered my third and final set of mammal tracks, an Eastern Gray Squirrel. Back at the trailer, I was startled when a fly-like insect flew right past my nose to land in the snow about 20' away. I went over with the camera to confirm my suspicions: Yup. A Small Winter Stonefly. I have to check our phenological records, but I don't believe we've ever seen a SW Stonefly this early in the season before.

I wanted to walk the Thames River Trail, but feared there would be little of me left by the time I completed the circuit. So I remained in the trailer after my foray to the creek, watching for birds through the window, complementing this watch with occasional visits to the tray feeder in the Nook. The sky was gradually darkening when I finally decided to start the arduous walk out. At the gate I installed a new combination lock to replace the old keyed lock.

**Snow:** average depth 17.7 cm ( $\approx 7''$ ) [slumped about 2'' since last visit]

**\*Wilderness Tip #528:** a good toboggan may cost \$100, but a garbage bag with plastic tie-straps costs only pennies. Toboggans can be hard to pull on sticky snow, while a garboggan slides easily over all such surfaces, even when fully loaded. Just drag it behind you.

**Birds:** (7)

Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (BCF); Wild Turkey (UM/GF)

**Grand Opening:**

Well, not that grand! The refurbished Newport Forest website is now up and running on my UWO website. This is just the first draft, so to speak, with typos and other problems being fixed on the fly. Our son Jonathan has posted the rewritten main page and will open the archives very soon, with pdfs of all reports over the last 5 years -- or more. It's slow work, but each visit to the website should reveal more reports in the archive.

Visit Newport Forest in your armchair at:

<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/conservation/Newport.html>

**IMAGES:**

## Deer scrapings



Deer will seek forage under the snow, looking for fresh shoots.

## Squirrel bounds over snow



The practice of bounding serves squirrels well in deep snow. The takeoff is on the left, landing on the right. Note drag marks caused by hind paws brought forward ahead of the fore paws for the landing.

## Open lead in Upper Rapids



During periods of higher temperatures ice begins to “rot,” marked by surface melt-water and a grey appearance as the ice erodes below. Not advisable to cross under these conditions!

## Small Winter Stonefly



This insect is about 1 cm long. My camera wouldn't let me get closer than this without going out of focus (!?) Stonefly larvae were found in the algal tresses during my recent survey of rapids microbiota.