

Newport Forest

Monday March 7 2011

2:35 - 7:05 pm

Weather: precip. 39 mm; RH 68%; BP 102.7 kPa; calm; clear; T +3° C

Purpose: to check the flood and to track more animals

Participants: Kee

I was amazed to find very little snow on the property, making it possible to drive in easily for the first time in several months. Average snow depth in the Lower Meadow was 4.3 cm and in the woods a good five to ten times higher. Evidently, the recent thaw left open areas virtually snow free -- until the recent (and rather minor) snow event.

The Redtailed Hawk greeted me with a swoop and a “scree” as I parked at the trailer. It was probably keeping an eye on the many Meadow Vole runs that decorated the snow with long, winding tunnels. Tracking conditions were ideal, with many tracks of Eastern Gray Squirrel and Eastern Cottontail running every which-way.

Since my last visit, the property had received another 39 mm of liquid equivalent precipitation. I put out plenty of winter rations for the birds and pretty soon the Chickadees and Nuthatches brought in other birds.

I looked down into the Fleming Creek Forest to find that the floodplain was, well, flooded. Water level was about 2-3 metres above normal, leaving nearly a metre to cover the forest floor. I walked to the river to find that the water now reached almost to the upper landing, making the flood waters about 3-4 metres above normal. A quick estimate based on flotsam, wee icebergs and jetsam drifting by revealed a central current speed of about 1.5 m/sec. At that speed it would take less than 24 hours for a rubber ducky to travel from the forks in London down to Newport Forest, whereas normal rubber ducky travel time is closer to three days! (Beatrix Potter School of Stream Hydrology) In any event, the flood would be classified as “minor” in our books. If we have a spring of prolonged low temperatures, that could be the worst flooding we get this year.

I was delighted to find tracks of a Red Squirrel in the Nook, along with tracks of a probable White-footed Mouse or perhaps a Deer Mouse. (They're impossible to tell apart.) Some 17 Canada Geese flew right over the Lower Meadow in three parallel lines. Later in the afternoon I spotted a Red Squirrel up on the Raccoon Nursery Box, enjoying a cheekful of seeds from the feeder tray.

At sunset I had a snack and some coffee, then played the tape of the Long-eared Owl, a bird we have yet to find at Newport Forest. There was no answer. Driving out was routine and smooth. The moon was a new crescent, hanging over the feeble remnants of a dying sun.

Birds: (7)

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Canada Goose (LM); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Red-tailed Hawk (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

IMAGES:



The Thames was about 120 metres across today. Mussel Beach is straight ahead and a good 3 m under the water. Tracks in foreground are squirrel-jumps leading from the river's edge, where it may have gone to drink.



Tracks of the Red Squirrel are smaller than those of the Eastern Gray, but the Red Squirrel uses the same jumping techniques, landing on its rear paws first.



Meadow Vole run starts (or ends) in the foreground and has two branches in the background. Meadow Voles use these for winter foraging. I was surprised to discover that the roof of the burrow is a good 2 cm thick. The Red-tailed Hawk watches for activity in these runs, given away, perhaps, by slight movements in the tunnel as the voles pass through. The runs are probably made in the same way as mole burrows, with the animal “nosing up” the snow as it goes.

Feral/domestic cat tracks on the left were hard to read because the animal was double-registering, placing the hind paw in the depression left by the fore paw.

Trail cam images: two Raccoons, one Eastern Gray Squirrel, six Blue Jays (same individual, at a guess)