

Newport Forest

Sunday March 20 2011

1:55 - 5:45 pm

**Weather:** prec. 37 mm; RH 80%; BP 103.3; sn/hz; NE  $\leq$  10 km, T +9° C

**Purpose:** to walk the Thames River Trail

**Participants:** Kee, Steve

The property was 99% snow-free, but still a bit soggy, so we parked our vehicles at the end of the Upper Meadow and walked down to the trailer in the Lower Meadow. As we arrived at the trailer, we heard the unmistakable sound of Tundra Swans overhead. A flight of some 20 birds was heading to the NNE, followed by two other, smaller flights.

The river is currently in what might be called a “medium” flood, with high water about 5 m above normal. The entire southern half of Fleming Creek Forest is under about 2-3 m of water and parts of the Blind Creek and Riverside Forests are inundated with a metre or two. The Thames River Trail turned out to come close to the edge of the flood in some places, but avoided it otherwise. (That took some pretty clever planning back when!)

We had barely gone past The Hole, when we found the ground littered with rabbit fur, the typical leavings of an owl or raptor. The vernal ponds are now fully charged, one might almost say “overcharged” with water. Steve heard a distant Spring Peeper call. We walked to the river to find it a meter higher than it was over a week ago and now just lapping the edge of the trail there.

After coming off the river bluffs, we did actually have to make one detour around a shallow inundation before regaining the Bluebell Wood which is on a terrace. Here we wandered over to a large depression (8m wide x 2m deep) that Steve calls the “sinkhole”. He thinks it was formed by water percolating through more porous soil beneath it and into the river. Indeed, on this occasion, the water may have percolated in reverse, because the depression had filled, with no visible connection to the river. Not far away we found some of my “siltometers”, graduated stakes driven at various locations throughout that part of the point bar complex. Being curious about the rate of silt deposition in these woods, I will read them on a later occasion.

A flight of Wood Ducks went “wheeping” upriver.

We continued on to the Hogsback, pausing here and there at various signs, including another scattering of rabbit fur and some chalky owl droppings, all of it

under a large Bitternut snag. After a break on the Hogsback, we continued on, me finding an owl pellet near the trail and Steve hearing some Wild Turkeys to the west. When they all suddenly took off, he pointed them out to me. One flight had 14 birds in it. I bagged the owl pellet for Pat, who loves to go through them after they have dried out. (The pellet consists mainly of the bones and fur of small animals that the owl disgorges at the end of its digestion process.)

Coming off the Hogsback I was astounded to see the whole west end of the Blind Creek Forest covered in about a metre of water, all of it evidently backed up from the mouth of Blind Creek. We continued without incident back to the camp, pausing only to change the SD card on the trail cam. (three visits by Raccoons, three by Blue Jays and one by an Eastern Gray Squirrel -- black, as usual).

We spent another half hour watching for new birds at the feeders, then departed. I had to drop some leek soup off at Eva Newport's before driving home. I found her front yard full of Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds. She said she has been seeing Killdeers for more than a week. There's some bad flu going around, she said. Nina already has it.

**Birds:** (12)

American Crow (BCF/W); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (FCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (HI/cam); Northern Harrier (WM); Red-bellied Woodpecker (HI/cam); Tundra Swan (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF/W); Wood Duck (TR)

**Animal tracks** (mostly in mud, a few in snow):

White-tailed Deer, including one large buck, Raccoon, Eastern Gray Squirrel, Wild Turkey, Eastern Cottontail (no Virginia Possum)

**Precipitation to date:** 189 mm

**IMAGES:**



Four Tundra Swans flying to their summer nesting grounds in the arctic.  
[This was as close as my zoom would get.]



Vernal Pond B is fully charged and ready for the coming frog chorus. I had to search to find a patch of remnant snow to give a more lively sense of the season.



Fleming Creek Forest (with creek in foreground) is inundated with flood water. Note faint greenish tint of an algal bloom.