

**Newport Forest**

Monday January 23 2012

1:45 - 5:00 pm

**Weather:** prec. 43 mm; RH 87%; BP 100.3 kPa; ovcst; SW 10 kmh; T 7° C

**Purpose:** snow tracking

**Participants:** Pat, Kee

How frustrating! We've been waiting since early December for a decent snow cover to develop on the property so we could indulge one of our favorite winter pastimes -- snow tracking. Under ideal conditions (snow about 5 -10 cm deep and slumping), paw prints and other marks are clear, IDs are easy, and one can build a picture of what animals are about, where they're going and even where they live. But when we arrived at the property we found it was 99.9% snow free, with no tracking to be done and (adding insult to injury) with intermittent rain.

Nevertheless we set out for the river along The Thames River Trail that leads from The Hole to the River Landing and beyond. One positive for the day was the relatively high air temperature. Passing Blind Creek at The Elbow, we found surface water covering rotting ice. At the Landing the Thames was wide open, with hanging ice along the shoreline and occasional ice cakes drifting by. Few birds were about and no mammals were seen.

Shortly after 4 pm, a heavier rain set in and we closed camp to set out for the Fleming Line, where we had left the van to walk in. Stopping by at the Hurdle House, we found TTLT Director Suzanne McDonald Aziz paying a social visit to Nina and Edgar, so we stayed for an old-fashioned chat until nearly 5 pm.

**Birds:** (5)

American Crow (UM); American Goldfinch (HP); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (EW); Dark-eyed Junco (HP)

**Coming Soon:**

We have prepared our first real Annual Report and it is almost ready to go out. We hope to do this every year from now on -- until we are too dysfunctional to walk or write.

**Phenology:** property snow covered for only three full days so far this winter.

**IMAGES:**



FinePix

Track this! Pictured here is one of the larger remnants of snow seen on the property today. The lack of snow puts our population of Meadow Voles somewhat at risk. They can't build tunnels under the snow and must forage on the surface, subject to predation by hawks and owls.



FinePix

Blind Creek, which normally consists of a chain of relict ponds (when not completely dried up), has reconnected with itself here, hinting at its ancient appearance. Soon we will be able to break away a section of the ice seen here to reveal hundreds of Fairy Shrimp, *Eubbranchippus vernalis*, wee pink shrimplike branchiopods swarming just below the ice. Organisms in this group are only distant relatives of the shrimp we eat. (We're not sure if a fairy shrimp cocktail would work.)



FinePix

Flood Debris: branches and corn stalks piled up against this small tree, have conspired to produce a makeshift shelter for wandering hermits. At this point in its course the river is eroding on the near side and depositing on the far side. During heavy floods bottom turbulence scoops up sand and silt, keeping it suspended. On the far shore currents are slower and the suspended material drops out to form the sloping banks seen there.