

**Newport Forest**

Sunday February 5 2012

2:05 - 6:00 pm

**Weather:** prec. 0 mm; RH 80%; BP 102.5 kPa; cloud/sun; calm; T 5° C

**Purpose:** trail maintenance

**Participants:** Kee, Steve

As soon as I got to the trailer I could tell that we would see more birds today. A small flock of Juncos flew out of the Nook, flashing their white tail coverts. I noticed what appeared to be our first Winter Stonefly (Plecoptera) on the trailer deck. It crouched upon the aluminum door sill. Why there of all places? Later it occurred to me that this was the lightest area in view, everywhere else being somewhat darker. They habitually gather everywhere on the surface of late winter snow. Was aluminum the closest to snow that this poor critter could find?

About when I finished setting up the camp and taking the weather, Steve walked in, not wanting to chance getting stuck on our still-squidgy ground. We headed out on the Thames River Trail, work gloves at the ready. The idea was to clear all obstructions and to re-line selected stretches of trail with new logs.

We stopped at the bee-tree on the river bluffs. Steve had discovered it last summer. He removed more combs, all dry. "Did you know there's a whole set of naked combs hanging over the Blind Creek Forest?" He didn't.

Some liners, shifted by floods or vandals, merely had to be relocated. Others had to be dragged out of the woods in the form of sometimes long branches. Here was a fine opportunity to use my patented method for breaking too-long deadfall into shorter pieces. You find two strong trees growing side by side and insert the branch between them at roughly waist height. You then walk a circle around the trees until you and they are in a line. The dead limb now resists further progress. Simply take a forceful step or two against the resistance and a loud cracking noise is heard. The limb snaps into two sections. Leverage is everything.

After a sitting break on the Hogsback bench, we descended into the Blind Creek Forest, where I showed Steve the hanging combs. "Ever seen anything like that?" He hadn't. On the way out of the Blind Creek area, Steve stopped to examine large tufts of fur which he said came from a deer. We speculated on how they became detached. I thought perhaps the deer had been scratching itself. Steve thought the deer might have been shot at. Would that tie in with the mysterious boot-prints I encountered on the previous visit? Who knows? In any case, there were deer tracks, sometimes multiple, along the entire Thames River Trail.

By the time we were ready to go fishing, it was already late afternoon. We went over to the mouth of Fleming Creek, where I thought Gizzard Shad might be congregating. That would be a new species for us. As we set up, a pair of Canada Geese honked skyward out of a clump of vegetation on the bank of the creek upstream. Mate-selection time?

There were no bites on our beetle grub baits and no fish visible in the murky water. It's frustrating when you know perfectly well that these fish have been virtually everywhere along the Thames, but you can't add them to the list until you see and identify one.

**Birds: (8)**

American Crow (UM); Bald Eagle (TR); Canada Goose (FC); Dark-eyed Junco (Nk); Downy Woodpecker (E/ET); Northern Flicker (BCF/LM); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

**Phenology:** first Winter Stonefly, no snow on property

**Conservation Note:**

I was invited to a meeting of landfill activists at the Oneida Reserve SW of London. It was about impacts that the nearby Green Lane Landfill site (which takes garbage from the Toronto area) might be having on residents. Of particular concern was Turkey Creek, a branch of which originates close to Green Lane. The creek runs through the Reserve, emptying into the Thames River on the north side of the Rez. We discussed testing Turkey Creek for specific pollutants, as well as the later possibility of conducting a vegetation survey along the creek. I agreed to approach appropriate experts in these areas in an effort to enlist their assistance.

Oneida residents are particularly alarmed by Green Lane's application for an expansion of the site to bring landfill operations even closer to the Rez. Already, they say, there are people with health issues, presumably caused by breathing in toxins from the air. Sometimes the smell becomes quite disagreeable. There is an agreement between the Band Council and Green Lane. Good idea to study it.

**IMAGES:**



FinePix

Naked honeycombs hang from the large branch of a Black Willow. The largest comb is about 1.5' across, others are smaller. Have the bees gone elsewhere? (with apologies for the late hour)



FinePix

Puzzling picture shows the mouth of Fleming Creek, where it joins the river, about 100 m away. From this spot, the river looks like a continuation of the creek. Mysterious silhouette in foreground is Steve casting his line from the high bank and staying near his safety tree. The sun is setting in the background. A bit late to be fishing, perhaps?





FinePix

Turkey Creek is one of only a handful of creeks emptying into the main Thames, from the forks down to Lake St Clair: Dingman Creek, Turkey Creek, Fleming Creek, Stink Creek (a small, sulphurous stream arising in the Enniskillen oil fields) and McGregor Creek in Chatham. There may be more, but not many, thanks to a narrow catchment area. This view of Turkey Creek was taken from the north side of Oneida territory. The creek flows past this vantage point, then out to the Thames, flowing from right to left in the background on its way to Newport Forest.