

Date & time: Wednesday December 19 2:20 - 5:40 pm

Weather: Pr 18 mm; RH 83%; BP 101.8 kPa; ovcst, calm; T 5° C

Activity: Kee walks the Thames River Trail

Soon after arriving I was surprised (just as I was on the last visit) by a bird we hadn't seen since last summer -- an American Goldfinch (female) in this case. They do show up occasionally during the cold months.

I decided to walk the whole Thames River Trail today, in spite of a nagging hip problem. The portion of trail that runs from the River Landing to the bluffs struck me as ideal: the log liners have moldered gracefully into mossy ridges, while



grasses carpet the pathway, as in the image above. Up on the bluffs I spotted a flotilla of 15 Canada Geese down on the river. I took out my camera with great stealth but they took wing anyway, sounding their bicycle horns, before I could even turn the camera on. Was it the flatulence? Continuing along the bluffs, I took

note of the ever-widening crack in the earth, running along the middle of the trail. The crack signals the slow separation of an immense piece of the bluffs, about 30 to 40 cubic metres of it, beginning its journey to the river below. I encountered another sign of erosion further on when I got to the Bluebell Woods. There a pair of medium-sized Blue Ash rooted precariously into an earthen overhang, seemed ready to topple at any moment. We do not regard any erosion on the property as a “threat”. Erosion is the natural result of flowing water. You just work around it.

Further along the trail I came upon signs of the predation of a deer. A great mass of hair concealed large pieces of hide below, still pliable and soft. No idea who the predator might be. Further on I realized that a large buck had used the trail earlier. It kept to the trail all the way up to the Hogsback, taking every twist and turn in stride -- highly gratifying to this trailmaker. (It can't be that bad if the deer like it.) Further on I spotted a log beside the trail with a weird pattern of white strands clinging to it. (See IMAGES below) Could it be the “plasmodium” of a slime mold? We don't often see this phase of the slime mold life cycle. .

I ascended the Hogsback where I sat for a spell on a bench, watching a Downy Woodpecker working a nearby oak tree. Later, passing through the Blind Creek Forest, I succeeded in starting up another flock of large birds, in this case four Wild Turkeys, clucking as they flew. Back in the trailer it was already getting dark, so I cleaned up camp and departed. I had a date with Eva Newport, matriarch of the Newport Family and about to turn 90. Despite entreaties from her family to move into a retirement home, Eva clings to her farmhouse with grim determination. Wouldn't she be happy in a new place? “Only if they let me have my lawn mower so I could mow the hall carpet every day.”

Birds: (10)

American Crow (ER); American Goldfinch (Tr); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF/HB)

Species Note: Thanks to Greg Thorn, our consulting mycologist, we are withdrawing our previous identification of the mushroom we called a “Collybia”.

Phenology: 2012 precipitation-to-date = 679 mm; Snowfree period #1 =24 days

IMAGES:



A pair of large Blue Ash trees cling precariously to the river bank with thickened roots, the soil below them being steadily eroded away.



We don't see these very often at Newport Forest. This appears to be the plasmodium (wandering phase) of a slime mold. It is like a giant amoeba, one enormous cell, but with thousands of nuclei. If you catch a plasmodium at the right time, you can even see it creep over log or leaf, like something out of a science fiction movie: *The Slime that Ate the World*

Later on, as it dries, the plasmodium will develop thousands of tiny spore capsules called sporangia to start the next generation. One can't usually identify a slime species from the plasmodium alone.