

**Date & time:** Sunday February 10 2013, 2:35 - 5:40 pm

**Weather:** Pr 41 mm; RH 72%; BP 102.3 kPa; calm, overcast; T +4° C

**Activity:** Maintenance, hanging ice and tricky squirrels

I parked in the Upper Meadow in 4-5" snow, fearing deeper snow in the Lower Meadow. I wasted no time in setting up camp, as this was to be a maintenance visit. The first order of business was to set up a new trail cam by the creek to replace the one submerged in the January flood. On the trail down to the creek, I was surprised to find evidence of a more recent -- and more massive -- flood. Large broken sheets of hanging ice clung to trees, blocking the trail ahead of me:



Fleming Creek is about 20 m downhill

Determined to continue after taking this image, I took another few steps only to find myself standing on an ice cake concealed under the snow. I remained upright for approximately 0.001 seconds. Down on the sheet, I frantically speared the hillside with my walking pole to prevent a slide down into the creek. Life in Newport Forest is full of delightful surprises like this. Does such exercise keep us

young or age us prematurely?

Returning by the Nook, I spotted what looked like urine, both on the ground and on a nearby snow-covered bench nearby. Not a lot, maybe 20 drops in both locations. Whodunnit? A deer can pee from something of a height, but there were no deer tracks in the Nook. Involuntarily I looked up at the branches overhead. A bird? The yellow-bladdered Woodpecker? Whoa! Birds don't pee. Later at home Pat suggested a squirrel. Of course!

There were squirrel tracks near the Nook, along with tracks of a hopping vole or mouse. Walking in earlier, I had crossed the trail of a Virginia Deer, a Coyote, an Eastern Cottontail and a Virginia Possum. I never saw a Raccoon track all day.

Since posting a trail cam by the creek would be hazardous, I decided to put one at the Elbow, a bend in the trail that leads to the River. On my way to the Elbow I spotted a movement in a tree ahead of me. Furtive. Was it a foraging squirrel? The animal reappeared, clinging to the side of a tree to check me out. "Whoa! That's gotta be the most emaciated squirrel I've ever seen -- and a young one too. Wait a minute, that's no squirrel, it's a weasel!" I tried to memorize the odd coat colours as I furtively reached for my camera: It reminded me of a Black-footed Ferret, but they live out west. "Wait a minute! How can it be a weasel? Weasels wear white fur coats during the winter." Later it came to me that occasionally a squirrel will lose all or most of its fur due to mites or some other form of mange. When this happens in the winter they are apt to freeze to death unless they den with other squirrels. In any case, the absence of fur accounted for the emaciated appearance. Fool me twice . . .

A few days ago at the Canadian Tire Store I purchased what I thought was a rather pricey trail cam only to discover when I got home that I had purchased two! I mounted them both at the Elbow, forming a kind of crossfire. Might some animal trigger both cams simultaneously?

I walked to the river, finding the upstream bend choked with pancakes and an open lead in front of me. Here too I found ice cakes high up on the landing. If the creek was dangerous, how much worse would the river be? Knowing how many people depend on my feckless adventures for amusement, I decided to exercise my prudence and head back. On the way I spotted the trail of a Coyote breaking into a run. It had switched from registering its tracks to an open gait, leaving toe-drags at all four prints.

I had put bird seed out earlier in order to take a quick census of who was around. The numbers were high, at least half chickadees, but the diversity was low. Just before I left I spotted a squirrel raiding the feeder. It watched me pityingly as I filled the garboggan and trudged away toward the Upper Meadow.

**Birds:** (6)

Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Common Flicker (FCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (Nk); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

**Phenology:** snow cover renewed Ja31, augmented Fb 08, massive flood occurred somewhere between the two dates.

**Readers Write:**

Two comments on the foggy scene of Fleming Creek in the last Bulletin: “Frame it.” and “Wow”.

Dave Martin, expert birder & naturalist: “Thought you might be interested in this NASA graphic about soil moisture and groundwater deviations from norms. It mirrors your comments about the moisture deficit in 2012 and hints at the increasing deficit and what it may foretell for 2013. . . Each day NASA posts an interesting graphic or photo. I check once a week or so to see what's been posted recently.” <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/IOTD/view.php?id=80221> “

Peter Dewdney, a brother in Toronto: “This is very interesting. Check it out.” He includes this link to a remarkable video of a Green Heron fishing with bait! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSclutBjeHk>

Patty Frank, a San Diego area nature lover: “Thought you'd enjoy bath-time with this baby owl.” <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/baby-owl-bath-time-video.html>

Virginia Abernethy of Vanderbilt University: “These photos are like ‘Where's Waldo?’ for the animal kingdom. Some of the critters are hard to find. Enjoy ...” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2253701/Invisible-animals-These-Incredible-images-animals-doing-disappearing-act-predators-near.html>

**IMAGES:**



Trail Cam Crossfire: New trail cams look at the Elbow from nearby and from far to the left on a distant snag. Trail forms an elbow on the right.



Today's lesson: A naked squirrel can resemble a weasel at a distance.