

Date and time: Sunday March 3 2013 2:05- 4:55 pm

Weather: Pr 18 mm; RH 74%; BP 101.7 kPa; ovcst/sun; calm; T -2° C

Activity: Erin samples Fleming Creek while Kee sets a light trap for the weasel

The air was cold, the ground was hard and the snow cover minimal. So we drove down to the trailer, set up camp and put out seed to see who would come. One of the first birds to show up was a Dark-eyed Junco, my first one since last winter! Erin had been waiting weeks for this visit, the release of pent up energy resulting in so many observations that I barely had time to write them down. It began with the Eastern Cottontail she saw hop away from the trailer. “Should we go down to the creek.?” She was down before I knew it, surprising a Red-tailed Hawk at the base of an old tree. It flew up to perch nearby, where it could watch her.



Erin Carroll

Erin then set to work with her aquatic net out in the creek rapids, even as I made my way gingerly down the bluff to join her. The old ice sheets were still there,

threatening any trespasser with a sudden crack and plunge. Erin breezily showed me the way. She had already been kick-sampling in the rushing water and caught a Greenside Darter, one of the more colourful members of the Perch family. She mentioned that she had also spotted a Red Squirrel in the woods nearby. Whoa!

Erin drew her invertebrate sample material from the toe of her aquatic net, then assisted my bootless self by levering out a shovelful of benthic muck from her sample area. And into my sample saver. I am currently hunting the dread “water bear”, a tiny eight-legged Tardigrade with fearsome claws and a bloodsucking stylet hidden in its snout. I have sighted this beast occasionally over a lifetime of microscopy, but never at Newport Forest.

Back in camp I spotted an Eastern Chipmunk, a cheerful sight. Along with Erin’s rabbit, it suggested that our resident weasel had not yet killed all its neighbours. We next decided to walk to the river to check on conditions there. On the way, a mild dispute arose; a squirrel-like animal dashed across the snow and off into the trees, it’s tail up. To me it looked like a large chipmunk. To Erin it looked like another Red Squirrel. But do Red Squirrels sometimes run with their tails held straight up? Neither of us knew. The river was up a metre, lined with shore ice and currently hosting a flock of Canada Geese that took flight when we appeared. Downstream a flock of Wild Turkeys flew from the north bank across the river and into Newport Forest. Noticeably larger than Canada Geese. Erin then spotted Mallards at the mouth of Fleming Creek. I heard them quack. Our bird list was growing apace.

On the way back we took down the two cams at the Elbow, returning them to the trailer for inspection and a change of batteries. Erin went out to birdwatch while I set up one of the cameras in the bedroom (converting it from trail cam to trailer cam). Suddenly Erin appeared at the trailer door with a breathless announcement. She had just seen a Tufted Titmouse. She saw it again but it flew off before she could snap a picture.

Closing camp, we drove out to the road, saluted by an honour guard of 13 Wild Turkeys that flew under the power lines. We stopped to visit Steward Nina Hurdle, now recovering from hip surgery. Walking up the drive Erin announced a Northern Cardinal by the house, her last observation of the day. As for Nina, she seems to be recovering well.

Birds: (12) **Best bird:** Tufted Titmouse

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (BCF); Dark-eyed Junco (Nk); Mallard (TR); Northern Cardinal (HP); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); Red-tailed Hawk (FC); Tufted Titmouse (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Nk); Wild Turkey (TR)

Phenology: Snow cover 10% in open areas, 20-30% in treed areas

Erin's Website: Nature in Ontario's Banana Belt now features Erin's own report of today's events, along with several interesting images, including two stonefly larvae.

Go to: <http://erintown.blogspot.ca/>

IMAGES:



This image of a Greenside Darter was taken in the summer of 2008. Today's image was less colourful and smaller. The Greenside is one of three darter species that we have found in the Fleming Creek rapids so far.



WILDVIEW

02-26-2013 10:10:29



Coyote glances to one side as it walks toward the trail cam at the Elbow. We moved this camera to the trailer to monitor the scat zone of a weasel that now seems to be living there. Perhaps we'll soon know what species it is -- short-tail or long-tail.

Yellow flags in foreground mark locations of Green Dragons found last spring (with Erin). These are a locally common member of the Skunk Cabbage family with a bizarre spathe-and-radix architecture.