

Date and time: Thursday March 7 2013 2:20 - 7:05 pm

Weather: Pr 0 mm; RH 71%; BP 102.7 kPa; N 5-10 kmh; overcast; T +1° C

Activity: Maintenance and weasel-hunting

Although the ground seemed firm enough, driving through the Upper Meadow, I got a queasy feeling as I descended to the Lower Meadow. I parked on the firmest ground I could find and poised the van for flight. Setting up the trailer, I was visited by a Small Winter Stonefly, a common sight as winter wanes.

I visited the Hole to further trim branches from a fallen elm that blocked the trail. The chain of vernal ponds (Blind Creek east) near the Hole were nicely charged,



with a covering of rotting ice, as above. A glance at the vernal Ponds past the Elbow (Blind Creek west) revealed a different situation that promised only widely scattered and rather shallow pools.

Back in the trailer, I removed the trail cam from the bedroom to return it to active duty at the Elbow in Blind Creek Forest. At the trailer table, I was amused by a Large Winter Stonefly, big brother of the smaller species, crawling along a finger.

I walked to the river, paying little heed to the surrounding landscape. I was increasingly obsessed with the fear that I might get stuck leaving the property and end up spending the night with a weasel. Back at the trailer I decided to drive out NOW, if I could. I gained what I thought was enough speed to make the second hill, but ground to a halt in the soil seep at the bottom. Wheels spun, first back then forth, mud flying everywhere, wheels churning down to the ice layer, where they at least had some support. I fishtailed all the way up the hill, the only driving force seemed to be the spray of mud ejecta, like a jet, from my all-terrain tires.. Finally gaining the upper meadow, I could have parked, but highballed out to the gate. No way was I going to get stuck *anywhere* today!

Walking back to the Lower Meadow from the road, I followed the rim of the Fleming Creek Bluffs, noting the turbid brown current and an interesting erosional feature that I would not have seen otherwise. (See IMAGES.)

For the rest of the visit I toured the Regeneration Zone in the Lower Meadow. We have stopped planting new trees, the zone now being “full”, but we forgot to put on bud-protectors for the winter -- custom-cut soda straws of varying diameters. They work, remaining all winter. Without them, every single unprotected tree gets severely nipped by deer, both terminal *and* lateral buds. No growth this year.

I enjoyed a quiet coffee in the trailer before walking out. Along the way, I gave my Screech-owl call. The owls definitely heard it but may have decided it was a telemarketer.

Weasel Report:

I hadn't realized that a flash going off in the confines of the trailer would result in a washed-out image. The camera did, indeed pick up an animal at the far side of the bed in two successive images with a 5-sec time separation. (See IMAGES.)

Birds: (8)

American Crow (EW); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (BCF); Canada Goose (FCF); Dark-eyed Junco (Nk); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Northern Cardinal (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

New Species:

Large Winter Stonefly *Taeniopteryx nivalis* FC EC Mr07/13
(Erin found this in Fleming Creek during our last visit. Her ID was confirmed by John Bittorf of the GACA. Prior to this we had only a tentative ID-to-genus.)

Phenology: open areas snow-free; Large & Small Winter Stoneflies emergent, Northern Cardinal singing mating call (if I'm any judge)

IMAGES:



Birth of a loop: Fleming Creek has many rather sharp loops, forming elongated isthmuses (don't try to pronounce it). I'll bet 1000 tons of soil that the heavy erosion shown here marks the beginning of a new loop. Stream hydrology is a fascinating subject. The principle at work when a river or stream forms meanders is the distribution of stream energy evenly along the watercourse. High energy stretches are where bends and loops tend to appear. The energy, in turn, depends on the "fall"-per-metre.



The trail(er) cam caught an animal in the trailer bedroom, as mentioned in the weasel report earlier. In this enlargement, my brother Peter succeeded in rescuing the image somewhat using Photoshop. Now the question arises which way the animal is headed. If that's the head to the right, then the image indicates a weasel, but with the tail dangling behind the mattress. So we still can't tell, in this case, if it's tail is short or long! (This is why I decided early on not to be a wildlife biologist.)

If the head is to the left, it must be tucked, at least somewhat, behind the mattress. Otherwise eyes & ears should show up. In this case the tail is to the right and might well belong to a Long-tailed Weasel.

The two images are five seconds apart, according to the time-stamp, the earlier position being a foot or so to the left of this one. That would lend support to the first possibility -- unless the animal was walking backward.