

**Date & time:** Sunday March 17 1:55 - 5:45 pm

**Weather:** Pr 17 mm; RH 70%; BP 102.7 kPa; sun/cloud; calm; T 0° C

**Activity:** Erin, Darren & Kee (plus Kimberly) welcome spring!

It was two o'clock, with no Darren in view, so we drove into the squidgy Upper Meadow as far as we dared, then parked the van. There were birds calling everywhere and I sensed a good birding day in the offing. Erin had already seen seven Hooded Mergansers on Fleming Creek. But where was Darren? We decided to look for Fairy Shrimp in the vernal ponds, only to be interrupted by a strange and loud hooting call. Erin & I looked at each other in puzzlement. Was that a sasquatch? It couldn't be Darren because his jeep wasn't around. Suddenly he



appeared on the River Trail with Kimberly Snake, a First Nations administrative officer. They had come upriver from Moraviantown by boat! This gave our name “River Landing” a new and meaningful dimension, calling to mind the role played by the river as the main highway for trade and travel for the First Nations, from

time immemorial, not to mention the European settlers.

We all heard them. Tundra Swans, some flying high overhead, others flying around the area much closer to the ground, perhaps foraging. To the accompaniment of their frequent calls, we repaired to the Nook for a sit-down and a catch-up. That very morning Darren had seen an American Woodcock on his property at Moraviantown. Kimberly presented Erin and me each with a gift, a kind of sweetgrass boutonniere. Erin told of seeing thousands of Tundra Swans recently up at Grand Bend on Lake Huron. I asked if anyone had heard or seen a Ruffed Grouse in recent years. No one had.

We walked down to the creek, still high from the recent flood, but now flowing briskly. The Fleming Creek forest presented an astonishing sight: Festoons of thin flood ice warped downward by the sun hung everywhere. It looked as though a sasquatch had spent the night decorating the forest with toilet paper. The flood had apparently crested a good four to five metres above the creek's normal level.

Erin had brought her aquatic net to see what organisms might be present on the creek bottom. With a scalloping motion she brought up fine gravel and mud, popping stonefly larvae into little bottles for everyone to inspect. These make indicators of good trout streams, she said. Then a water boatman. Then two minnows, both Spot-tail Shiners. "Excellent Pickerel bait," she remarked. (Darren's ears perked up.) The size, the row of dark dots along the lateral line, and the prominent spot on the tail serve to identify this fish.

Next, we climbed back to the meadow and off to the the river. Darren wanted me to check out what looked like lilies coming up. These were the first shoots of Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudocoris*), nonnative, but with a cheerful yellow bloom. Over coffee back in the Nook we discussed the recent clear-cutting controversy in Chatham-Kent next door to Elgin Co. People who understand what's going on and who object to the process should send a letter/message to the County clerk:

[CKcorpserv@chatham-kent.ca](mailto:CKcorpserv@chatham-kent.ca).

On the way out to the boat, Darren used his chain-saw to cut up the dead elm that had fallen across the trail some months ago. We saw him and Kimberly off down the river, then headed for the van to drive out. From the gate we watched a Northern Harrier fly away down the road, then a pair of Red-tailed Hawks.

**Birds:** (17)            **Best birds:** Tundra Swan, American Robin

American Crow (UM); American Robin (TR); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (TR); Common Flicker (FCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Hairy Woodpecker (BCF); Hooded Merganser (FC); Northern Cardinal (GF); Northern Harrier (FC/Rd); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Red-tailed Hawk (UM); Tundra Swan (TR); Turkey Vulture (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wood Duck (FC)

**Phenology:** snow cover still around 10 percent, first American Robin, first Turkey Vulture, first Tundra Swans, Iris leaves emerging (7-9”).

**ATBI Conference:** Kee plans to attend the ATBI Conference in the Great Smokey Mountains from March 21 to 24 (Gatlingburg TN) He hopes to file a report on his return. (ATBI = All taxa biological inventory)

## IMAGES:



Erin dredges up some fresh creek-bottom for Darren to inspect.



Erin Carroll

Red-tailed Hawk circles its farewell over the Upper Meadow as we leave.