

Date & Time: Saturday March 30 2013 1:50 - 6:35 pm

Weather: Pr 2mm; RH 36%; BP 102.4 kPa; clear; SE 0-10- kmh; T +16° C

Activity: Environmental scan and meeting the weasel

The temperature in the Lower Meadow (a somewhat sheltered area) was 16° C, well above the predicted high of 11° C. The soil is no longer saturated, but still damp. It has thawed down and drying quickly. The drive in was trouble free.

Job One was to clean out the trailer bedroom, where the weasel has been living. We little realized that it would try to befriend us later. Pat had just finished stripping the upper sheets (along with the scat), leaving two foam sheets awry on the bed. I was relaxing out in the Nook, psyching up for my walk of the Thames River Trail. Then Pat's loud whisper from the trailer. I turned. "Get over here!"



Childrens Encyclopedia

I post-hasted to the deck, passing another whisper: "It's under the foam sheet!" In the bedroom, the sheet was quivering. I lifted it partially, then wholly. A sleek brown animal raced for the corner and dived. As it went, I was barely alert enough to notice the black-tipped tail and its length. This would be the decisive clue to the species. The tail was about about half the length of the body, making it a Long-tailed Weasel. The body was similar in size to that of an adult Red Squirrel, and rather like the image shown above. Was this the same individual as

the juvenile weasel we saw last summer? But more on the weasel later.

Birds were scarce, owing perhaps to frequent gusts of cool wind. While Pat bird-watched, I set out on my trek around the Thames River Trail with a sense of resignation. By a subtle geographic mechanism still unknown to science, the trail actually lengthens every year!

Just inside Blind Creek Forest, I noted with satisfaction that the vernal ponds east of the Elbow (a sharp bend in the trail where it crosses Blind Creek) were fully charged, although no frogs were calling. The ponds west of the Elbow, however, had very little water, in some cases none. Would the situation at the far end be any better? I would know once I reached the Hogsback.

Resting on the river bluffs bench, I watched the slow, turbid current, still high, carrying past remnants of the most recent flood. The general landscape was a dull gray-brown, the skeleton of winter waiting to flesh out in green. Continuing along the trail I noted frequent branches and logs obstructing the trail, some flotsam, some deadfall. (We will have to bring in a trail crew soon to clear the debris and ready the trail for the spring season.) Here and there along the way, new green shoots, most still rather small, peeped out from the soil. Up on the Hogsback I set out for the spot where the Harbinger of Spring, our first ephemeral to emerge, is usually found. Nothing yet. As I began the descent into the Blind Creek Forest, I noted with satisfaction that the farthest vernal ponds had become reasonable-sized breeding pools. I counted four Chorus Frogs calling, altogether.

His notice sudden is. A movement near the trail caught my eye. An Eastern Garter, out foraging on the warm side of the Hogsback froze near the trail, trying to look like a fallen branchlet, perhaps. The rest of the walk was uneventful. I called Pat on the walkie-talkie. She was watching an Eastern Gray Squirrel on a snag near the trailer. Back in camp, I learned that she had seen the weasel up close and personal, so to speak. Returning to the bedroom, she found the weasel out on the bed again. And again it dashed for the corner, but this time stopped and turned to stand high on its hind legs, the better to inspect its unwelcome visitor. Pat saw its cream-white belly, smallish ears, beady eyes and pink nose. Somehow, *her* unwelcome visitor became slightly less unwelcome.

Birds: (11)

American Crow (UM); American Robin (BCF); Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (LM); Common Grackle (GF); Downy Woodpecker

(BCF); Mourning Dove (GF/E); Northern Cardinal (FCF); Tundra Swan (UM); White-breasted Nuthatch (HB/E)

Supplemental: (5)

a) seen in immediate area after laving property: Northern Harrier, Red-winged Blackbird, Turkey Vulture; b) from Marg Hulls' visit yesterday: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mallard

New Species:

Long-tailed Weasel *Mustela frenata* Tr Pd/KD Mr 30/13
(ATBI list has been updated by replacing the earlier weasel record with this one.)

Rock Elm *Ulmus thomasii* Loc DC Mr29/13

Tree Survey: Newport Steward Donald Craig is a professional forester who recently carried out a survey of Blue Ash on the property, finding 222 stems (exclusive of the youngest recruits) of which about 30 were over 30 years old. He also found a Rock Elm, new to the list. His reports will be forwarded to Stewards, the TTLT and interested Botanists.

Phenology: soil thawed to shovel depth, trees about to break bud

New Readers and a Writer:

We welcome another dozen readers, most of them American, that we met at the ATBI Conference in TN recently. We also look forward to our new link with another ATBI project at Crane Hollow in Ohio. Joe Moosbrugger and Heather Stehle manage the project and we hope to stay in touch with them. Joe has already written to suggest that the Rhododendron tree pictured in the Conference report (# 868) is probably *R. maxima*.

Brother Christopher Dewdney recommends the following startling video about the Birds of Paradise in New Guinea -- from the Cornell Ornithology Lab::

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTR21os8gTA&feature=youtu.be&t=>

IMAGES:



It's a good time of year to examine landforms without the obscuring vegetation. Viewed from the bluffs, as here, the point bar across the river appears to be composed mainly of coarse sand. Boxelders and Willows have colonized the bar, helping to stabilize it. In this scene the river is still running about a metre higher than normal. Area trees are only just beginning to break bud.



A view from the Hogsback trail reveals Vernal ponds at the west end of the area charged with enough water for frogs and salamanders to breed in. Today, just a handful of Western Chorus Frogs were out playing their pocket combs.