

Date & Time: Thursday April 4 2013 2:10 - 6:00 pm

Weather: Pr 0 mm; RH 38%; BP 102.4 kPa; sun/haze; S 0 - 15 kmh; T 11° C

Activity: Our first Steward (& Stewardess) are put to work.

Nic, our assistant during the first critical Years of Newport Forest (2000 - 2004), has been awarded the position of First Steward. Following an award ceremony hosted by the Trailer Weasel, we celebrated by putting both Nic and his wife Sarah to work immediately on clearing and lining the trails!



It didn't take long for us to stop shivering inside our spring jackets, as the work of the trail, scraping, clearing, lining and so on, brought body temperatures up to the shedding point, coats opening. The wooded areas were also distinctly warmer than the opens. We lined several sections of trail from the Hole to the Riverside Forest. The sunlight slanted in friendly warmth through the trees, setting a few billion more plant cells into motion. We left trail work and strolled the rest of the way in leisurely fashion, Sarah delighting in the sudden flight of some Wild Turkeys.

We expected to hear a chorus of frogs from the Blind Creek vernal ponds, but heard almost

none as we descended the Hogsback trail. It may have been a bit too cold for them. The vernal ponds remain much as they were last week, with adequate water in the traditional Blind Creek breeding area.

Arriving back at the trailer, Sarah sighted a “beautiful red bird,” showing us the Northern Cardinal through fresh eyes. Do we realize how many exotic birds we have in this country? The Blue Jay that arrived next stirred even more wonder. Glancing at our watches we discovered that a visit to Eva Newport was immanent, so we made haste to clean up camp and depart for Eva’s place over on the next line. Eva, recently turned 90, was looking forward to warmer weather. She was glad to see Nic again and took a shine to Sarah. Her main topic of the day was how the sharp rise in land prices was driving rural taxes sky-high.

Birds: (9)

American Crow (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (GF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Northern Cardinal (BCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (BCF); Wood Duck (BCF)

Phenology: no bud break by this date; frog chorus weak

Weather: We continue to test the “three-month hypothesis”: the precipitation for the first three months of the year averages, some 19% of the total. Last year we predicted 606 mm and received 704, just below drought level. The accuracy of such predictions must be understood against the statistical background presented in a pdf that readers with an interest in weather can request. In brief, the predictions differ from their corresponding annual figures by an amount that has mean zero, but a high variance, not surprisingly. The system is most useful in wet or dry extremes by providing an early warning. This year we predict 837 mm total rainfall, about midway between drought level and the regional average.

Readers Write:

Charles Spina, a local nature enthusiast, writes about the sighting of a Short-tailed Weasel in the Hamilton area: “That is the type of weasel I saw four winters ago on the Stoney Creek path between the Windermere entrance and the second bridge. My sighting was of a pure white one, with black-tipped tail. I had two other witnesses. Before we moved on, the [animal] entertained us for five minutes.”

IMAGES:



Whenever a big flood comes along, the crest rises above the entire Riverside Forest. The water inflow slows considerably and the heaviest particles of entrained soil rain out of the floodwaters. Thus sand is deposited by the shore, while finer particles settle inland. Nic stands in the middle of the extensive sand bar so formed.

The Thames Talbot Land Trust will be pleased to know that Newport Forest is gaining a good 10 square meters of area annually, even as the property across the river loses at the same rate. The gigantic point bar, Riverside Forest as a whole, is still growing.

POP GOES THE WEASEL!



Thanks to the trail cam donated by Tim Carroll, we now have a somewhat clearer image of the Trailer Weasel. The length of tail certainly qualifies it as a Long-tailed Weasel. Newport Forest is just inside its range which includes virtually all of the United States and part of southern Ontario. A series of such images shows the weasel apparently making a new home under this corner of the bed.

Our first impulse (later to be overruled by common sense) is to see if we can "live" with the weasel, starting with a trial meal in the dining area at the other end of the trailer.