

Time: 2:10 - 5:55 pm

Weather: Pr 7mm; RH 64%; BP 102.0 kPa; clear; S 15-20 kmh; T 15° C

Activity: walking the Thames River Trail with Kee

Except for beech and ironwood, the trees are now bare of leaves and the landscape at Newport Forest has turned a thousand shades of brown, yellow and grey. From the rim of the creek bluffs behind the trailer I saw the creek below, with blue sky



reflected in placidly flowing water. There seemed to be more birds about, perhaps because Pat had set up a gravity feeder for smaller birds last Saturday. Several chickadees flitted back and forth between the feeder and bushes nearby.

The weather was nice enough to encourage a complete circuit of the Thames River Trail, a mere two-km walk that would give me a view of much of the property. To make the walk more productive, I decided to go off-trail deliberately here and

there in case there was anything “new” to see. The first diversion took me into an open-looking forested area near the east end of the Hogsback, where I found several mossy stumps that looked like they were cut back in the 90s, or earlier. Ascending the river bluffs, I noted that Mussel Beach below had mostly emerged from recent high waters. Moving on to the Riverside Forest, a second off-trail diversion turned up a pink plastic love seat from a girl’s doll play set. This illustrates once again the enormous variety of jetsam brought in by winter floods. We have found several tires on rims, one or two tire casings, a small television set, a child’s plastic golf play set, a paddle, a love note in a bottle, and so on. I set the little seat upright and put up a wee leafy arbour in case any local pixies were looking for a love seat. (I was having a slow day.)

In the middle of the Riverside Forest I made an abrupt right at the trail to the Sandbar. Here I found a burrow that led under some roots. (See IMAGES, below.) Then some female voices across the river reminded me of the fishing and hunting camp across the river. Back on the main trail, I heard the characteristic yelp of Wild Turkey hens to the south. A second piercing call came from a Common flicker as it flew shrieking overhead through the Blind Creek Forest.

Apart from those calls, the entire area seems to have settled into a quiet spell, as though awaiting the onset of snow and cold weather. Back in the trailer, I enjoyed a pick-me-up coffee when a third bird, an Eastern Screech Owl whinnied from the Fleming Creek Forest, reminding me that it was time to leave. As I cleaned the table, I noticed something strange. No mouse droppings and no chewed up kleenex. Unheard of! Was this the (indirect) work of our resident weasel?

Birds: (9)

American Crow (UM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (HBF); Common Flicker (BCF); Dark-eyed Junco (Tr); Eastern Screech Owl (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wild Turkey (RSF/W)

Stewards Meeting: Newport Stewards met at Nina Hurdle’s house across the road last Saturday to hear the annual report and set a budget for 2013. Highlights of 2012 included the Spring and Fall work days (17 and 10 volunteers, respectively), the Spring Wildflower Walk (32 visitors), the Annual Butterfly Count, the Fungus Walk and 122 new species for the ATBI list, gathered in the course of 60 site visits, bringing the total to 1895 species.

IMAGES:



Burrow under tree roots near Sand Bar is just large enough to accommodate a Raccoon but almost certainly wasn't made by one. In any case the entrance shows little sign of recent use. The tunnel goes in about four feet, then makes a bend to the left, to end I know not where. But again: What made it? Any thoughts?

[scale bar in cm indicates a vertical height of over 25 cm and width of about half of that]



A fishing & hunting camp across river consists of one trailer and two cabins. In 2001 I interviewed old Delbert Sitler in one of those cabins in order to get the record of his “lore”, including the names of every kind of fish he’s ever caught in the river. (Before that I had never heard of a “Black Crappie”.) Fishing was Delbert’s biggest joy in life. (See Sp25 2001 in the archives at the following URL for a full account:

<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/>)

There was no hunting or fishing going on at this point, just the sound of two ladies in a conversation almost clear enough to eavesdrop on.