

Date and time: Wednesday February 19 2:00 - 4:10 pm

Weather: Pr 43 mm: RH 75%; BP 100.8 kPa; sun/cloud; W 5-10 kmh; T +6° C

Activity: Late winter visit by Kee & Will

Over London a Lake Huron streamer had been dumping snow as from a conveyor belt. But before we got to Wardsville some 60 km to the southwest, a beautiful blue sky had emerged, bordered by a shelf of high, pearly clouds.

I'm never so wise as when wise by accident. Having a strong, young assistant was just the thing today. Will did most of the digging on this visit. First he had to dig behind the property gate just enough for us to squeeze through. The county snow plough had been by earlier, piling more heavy wet snow onto roadside banks and, of course, making Newport Forest all the more difficult to access. Will pulled a small sled with our supplies on it along the track to lower elevations. I followed, looking around as we went, but only spotted our first animal when we paused at



the rise just ahead in the image above. “What’s that?” said Will. His boot pointed at a small black insect on the snow. The sight reassured me that all was right with the world, after all. A small winter stonefly, right on schedule as it were, wandered randomly over the snowy surface. I explained to Will that the winter stoneflies would come out about this time of year on the first warmish days. We had just passed a seasonal milestone.

We counted some eight deer beds on that rise, some with grass mattresses exposed by body heat. Further on Will spotted two of the deer watching us descend into the Lower Meadow. Then they shyly faded into the forest.

The Lower Meadow area is always warmer than the Upper Meadow, today being 6° C, thanks to the sun. More Stoneflies. Once again (hopefully for the last time this year) we put out two localized caches of emergency feed for mammals and birds. If we erred in doing so, it was on the side of caution.

We measured snow depths and took a core to estimate total H₂O equivalent precipitation. We did little other work or exploration as this was a brief visit. One piece of bad news emerged when we rested at the trailer table for a break. Lining the bench seat on one side of the table were several weasel scats. Tim the weasel was back to haunt our overnight stays. Time to go. The walk out was uneventful and the van started beautifully. We parked on the other side of the road to pay a quick visit to long-time area residents, Edgar and Nina Hurdle. The van promptly slid into a ditch we hadn't realized was there. (See IMAGES for the rest of the story.)

Snow data:

Average depth along one side of Lower meadow: 45.7 cm

Equivalent water from core: 113 mm.

(Some snow was inevitably lost to sublimation since December.)

Birds: (7)

American Crow (FCF); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (Tr); Dark-eyed Junco (HP); Northern Cardinal (HP); Red-bellied Woodpecker (Tr); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr)

Species note:

Stoneflies are excellent indicators of good quality stream habitat as the larvae require high dissolved oxygen just to survive. They are therefore good candidates for regular monitoring. Adults of the Winter Stonefly and Small Winter Stonefly families emerge from streams in January or February, depending on species. The stonefly pictured below appears to be a species of small winter stonefly in the genus *Allocapnia*. There are about 125 species of stonefly in nine families that inhabit the Great Lakes Area. And with over 40 species of *Allocapnia* alone in North America, many of them lookalikes, we will not hazard a guess at the species.

IMAGES:



Small winter stoneflies (incl. *Allocaupnia* sp.) are often our first visible insects in late winter, heralding warmer weather ahead. The question arises: What are they doing wandering over an endless expanse of crystal boulders? Apparently looking for mates!



Human Ecology Dept.

Our final eco-adventure involved a visit to Steward Nina Hurdle who lives across the road from the gate. Parking on what I thought was terra firma, we sank into a roadside ditch cleverly concealed by the county snow plough. 95 year old Edger Hurdle cheerfully chained the van to his old CASE tractor and pulled us out of the ditch. Then he drove the tractor back to his barn . . .





. . . only to get stuck himself in the generous deposits of the county snow plough. Will did most of the digging while I mostly struggled with Edgar, trying to get the shovel away from him. All's well that ends well.