

Date and time: Monday March 10 2014 2:45 - 5:10 edt

Weather: Pr 23mm; RH 77%; BP 100.6 kPa; sun/haze; SW 0 - 10 kmh; T 9° C

Activity: Kee & Will check conditions on site

Balmy air, hazy from evaporating snow, greeted us at the access gate. The upper meadow is still 90% snow-covered, with thousands of last year's stems poking through an average depth of about 8-10 cm. The snow had slumped, now heavy and damp. Did the Wild Turkey tracks that followed the open areas beside the road mean that they had foraged there?



The lower meadow had deeper snow that ranged from 10-20 cm, with some drifts to 40 cm. The rain gauge held 23 mm of precipitation and the thermometer-in-a-box read 9 degrees celsius in the shade. (The lower meadow is generally warmer than the surrounding area on sunny days during cold months.) We set up the bird feeders, a year round practice, then began to set out several food-drops, a practice that we adopted only for this winter.

We started by the trailer and worked our way out to the river. While still in the Lower Meadow, Will pointed out some scat. It was Coyote-sized, but somehow meagre-looking and dark, full of self-licking and little else. The animal appeared to have been feeding poorly. Elsewhere, I spotted some tufts of rabbit fur lying on the snow. Examining one, I realized that it had a patch of skin attached. One Eastern Cottontail was no longer with us. I hesitate to connect the coyote and the rabbit. I also hesitate to connect the numerous small down feathers blowing across the snow and the distant hawk we sighted when first walking in to the property.

As we entered the Blind Creek Forest a glorious sun illuminated the somewhat deeper snow, conspiring with the soft air to suggest the coming spring. We made our way to the river, discovering three small congregations of Canada Geese (about 30) gathering around the edges of a newly opened lead. Sighting us they began to honk nervously and finally took off with a clamour of bicycle horns, flying down-river. Minutes later they passed overhead in two echelons to see if we had gone yet. We obliged them by leaving. The river remains mostly frozen over.

On the way back, Will spotted a large blood-stain in the snow, with no apparent signs of struggle (or dinner) around. Challenges abound for the amateur tracker.

Back in the Lower Meadow, I sent Will down to the creek rapids to return the collection of mossy rocks that I had taken on December 12 as part of a microbial sample. While Will was gone, I noticed a few stoneflies crawling over the snow as I examined some of the buds on nearby trees. Some hickory buds looked withered. I also waited for more birds to show up, even as the wind gradually strengthened and grew gustier. Two Black-capped Chickadees and a White-breasted Nuthatch visited the feeders. Along with one or two Blue Jays, that was it for the duration of our visit. Had the wind inhibited them or were they merely lying low?

Birds: (6)

American Crow (WR); Black-capped Chickadee (Nk); Blue Jay (BCF); Canada Goose (TR); White-breasted Nuthatch (Tr); Wild Turkey (UM);

Readers Write:

Chris Dewdney sends this report of his recent visit to the Woodlands Cultural Centre at Brantford, where the first snow snake tournament in years was held: "There were snow snake teams from all over, Seneca, Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida and others, each mustering a team of six to eight throwers. . . . I was able to watch the "sudden death" finale, when regardless of previous scores the team with the furthest snake won the tournament. The wooden snow snakes themselves are beautiful, works of art with metal inlays at the head. I shot some footage with my mini dv camera . . ."

Climate Change Report:

We will issue the result of further investigations into the root cause of this exceptionally long and harsh winter in a few days. Watch for it!

IMAGES:



Softened profiles of animal tracks in the Blind Creek Forest tell of slumping snow, now averaging about 15 cm in depth. Most of the prints above were left by Virginia Deer, a few by Coyote.



In winter some land forms emerge in stark relief, such as this erosional basin beside Fleming Creek. In the year 2000 it was only a modest little cliff beside the creek. Since then it has deepened and widened every year. We would guess that a new loop is being formed. These are rather sharp meanders of which the creek already has two. The formation of a third loop points to a continuing evolution of the creek in which the energy of its flow becomes gradually more evenly distributed along its length. The image was taken from the top of the creek bluff that forms the eastern edge of the Upper Meadow, some 40 metres above the creek.