

Date & time: Thursday April 24 2014 2:20 - 5:45 pm

Weather: Pr 2 mm; RH 31%; BP 102.4 kPa; sun/cld; SE 5-10 kmh; T 15° C

Activity: Looking for spring ephemerals and scouting for scat

The drying trend continues across our region (southern Ontario) as spring advances. The drive into the site just keeps getting easier. Today's new ephemeral was the Spring Beauty, now in bloom everywhere it grows. The plant is *protandrous*, a



word you can forget as soon as you learn it; it means that each flower of the Spring Beauty goes through a male phase, followed by a female phase. During the male phase, it sports pink anthers, as above. A day or two later, it will have a stigma instead, ready to receive pollen from other plants. The protandrous strategy helps plants prevent self-pollination, a practice that can lead to blindness or insanity.

Before heading out, I had to assess the trailer for overnight occupancy. I was dismayed to find that the Long-tailed Weasel we have taken to calling "Tim" is back in the trailer, leaving scat (black, shiny, twisted, and about 0.5 x 4-5 cm) along the

top of couch seats and elsewhere. Should we try to get rid of it or simply try to co-exist? I'm for the latter option, Pat is not.

Speaking of scat, I walked to the river to check that the flood was basically over, when I encountered an interesting collection of droppings right in the middle of the trail that leads up the bluffs. The droppings were almost human-like, broken into segments between 2-3 cm in diameter, some chalky white in colour. I have two images of these droppings for anyone interested in tracking to examine. (Just drop me a line.) They have been lying out in the open for several days, at a guess. I would also guess the droppings were left by a predator that may have been scavenging bone material. The only regional mammals that have scat in this range of size and shapes are Raccoons, Coyotes and Cougars.

Returning to the Nook, I sat to observe and listen for birds. It is very unusual to see an Eastern Gray Squirrel (black phase in our case) come as close to camp as two did on this occasion. They seemed to have no interest in the tray feeder but alternated in watching me warily and chasing each other around the Black Maple.

Although the weather has softened considerably, it still seems to have an enervating effect on me. Feeling unusually tired, I left the site a little earlier than I had intended. This resulted in an artificially shortened bird list.

Birds: (11)

Black-capped Chickadee (GF); Blue Jay (GF); Common Flicker (FCF); Downy Woodpecker (GF); Mourning Dove (BCF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Pileated Woodpecker (FCF); Red-bellied Woodpecker (GF); Tree Swallow (Rd); Turkey Vulture (LM); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF)

Phenology:

A sample extracted from the Newport Forest Phenology Records (2000-2014) show range of dates for the first bloom of the Spring Beauty as compared with those for the Trout Lily. First date is earliest bloom; second date is latest. Dates are apt to be a day or two late, owing to our not always arriving on the exact day.

Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)

April 03 April 19

new "latest" is now April 24

Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*)

March 28 April 23

"latest" already exceeded

IMAGES: (featuring Trail Cams #1 & #2)



Raccoon: 7:50 pm Ap23: has been feeding on camera bait, perhaps. Seems in good condition, but early outing may indicate hunger.



Virginia Deer: 8:03 am Ap24: this doe is not only moulting heavily, but seems somewhat emaciated from the prolonged cold and competition for browse.

If one finds a good location for them, trail cameras are an excellent way to keep an eye on resident mammals — and some birds.