

**Date and time:** Saturday January 24 2015 2:15 - 4:30 pm

**Weather:** Pr 18 mm; RH 92%; BP 100.3 kPa; overcast; calm; T - 1° C

**Activity:** Good tracking in damp snow.

The van trundled easily through the shallow snow of the Upper Meadow with no sign of underlying slush or ice. Then down to the trailer that overlooks the creek bluffs in the Lower Meadow. Almost immediately, the surrounding area betrayed an impossibly complicated network of tracks. Our work was cut out for us. With me was Brian Cornish, our sometime assistant and handyman.



Brian spotted this nest, possibly made by an American Goldfinch in the crotch of a thorn tree in the Lower Meadow. It was about 2' above the ground and would have been well concealed when foliage was present.

The snow on site was only a few centimetres deep and damp enough to register prints quite nicely. For us, “tracking” means primarily the identification of the animal making the tracks. But it may also involve following the tracks to get a clue about what the animal was up to. There was little time today for that kind of tracking, except to observe, in some cases, the directions and numbers of individuals involved. For example, we found numerous coyote tracks leading from Harvey’s bean field (as we call it), through the Hole in Blind Creek Forest and thence to the river, peeling off for the Hogsback. We called it the “Coyote Highway.” (See IMAGES.) Virginia Deer tracks would occasionally follow our trail briefly, but most often crossed it, indicating a foraging pattern, rather than a

travel plan. We stopped to examine one set of tracks with a long stride that left drag marks, especially characteristic of deer tracks in deeper snow. Terminology: the “stride” of an animal is the distance travelled by one foot; the “straddle” is the lateral distance between prints, as measured at right angles to the direction of motion. The straddle of one set of Raccoon tracks on the River Trail was easy to measure, as the stride brought each rear paw up even with the print of the forepaw.

Perhaps because we often leave feed as bait for the trail cams, the vicinity of the trailer was laced with the tracks of Raccoons, Eastern Cottontails, Eastern Gray Squirrels, and multiple birds, including Dark-eyed Juncos, the only bird we saw today. Missing or simply missed were tracks of Virginia Possum, Striped Skunk, and, of course, the Long-tailed Weasel living in the trailer.

Tracks are not the only object of study in the art of tracking. “Signs” include burrows and dens, hair and feathers, scat, scent marking, diggings, and so on. We spotted several places where Eastern Gray Squirrels had dug through the snow to get at the leaf litter below. And in the Blind Creek Forest there were two small areas just off-trail, covered by Coyote tracks and patches of yellow snow, scent markings. Our final foray of the afternoon was to descend the creek bluffs, discovering in the process that only Virginia Deer had been visiting the water, mainly to cross into the Fleming Creek Forest. My feet were freezing and it was time to leave.

**Trail cam:** One buck already developing antlers, apparently, and two does showing up at different times, both well-furred. One well-furred Raccoon and two Blue Jays digging for buried kibble.

**New Species: (7)**

Amphipod	Crangonyctidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
Beetle	Elmidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
Caddisfly	Hydroptiliidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
Mayfly	Heptageniidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
Snail	Ancylidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
Stonefly	Nemouridae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14
True fly	Chionomidae	FC ec/DJ <sub>1</sub> Au10/14

**Note:** The families listed above resulted from aquatic samples taken by Erin Carroll and me at Fleming Creek on August 10 last. Although we do not know

what species these were, new families automatically count as new species. The protocol we follow requires us to replace any of the above by an actual species record in the ATBI database, once one is found belonging to the family in question. [initials: ec = Erin Carroll (collector); DJ<sub>1</sub> = Dave Johnson (identifier)]

### **Readers Write:**

Greg Zeigler, nature lover and former military intelligence officer: “Appears to be a shotgun blast. The center of the pattern has broken through, but some pellets apparently did not. The shot was apparently fired obliquely from the right, judging from the asymmetric craters. You should be able to retrieve some of the pellets using a metal detector. This just looks like stupid vandalism to me.”

Heather Greenwood: “Wendy the Weasel. Is there a children's story in there somewhere? I know she makes a mess, but I'm glad to hear she's back.

A note on the shotgun hole on the 911 sign: I remember our neighbours in the Shelburne farming community had to put up a video camera to catch the culprits shooting their mailbox over and over.”

Dave Martin, expert area birder, comments on Pete Chapman’s January 4th Christmas Bird Count at Newport Forest: “I'd say they got all of the common birds that should be around in the winter plus a few ‘goodies’ such as Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Bluebird and Yellow-rumped Warbler — which do overwinter but are not widespread or common in winter.”

Dave also points us to a CBC story: “Apparently it was warmer on Mars yesterday, where the Curiosity Rover was, than most of Canada. You can cite that as an example of global cooling offsetting global warming.”

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/mars-warmer-than-parts-of-canada-us-1.2895092>

### **References:**

Mark Elbroch. 2003. *Mammal Tracks and Signs: A Guide to North American Species*. Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA.

Olaus J. Murie. 1974. *A Field Guide to Animal Tracks* (2nd Ed.) The Peterson Field Guide Series, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston MA.

### **IMAGES:**



Coyote track reveals pattern characteristic of virtually all members of the dog family. One can distinguish such tracks from those of other groups by the appearance of an X in the middle of the print. There is no such X in the print of any other mammal family. The central toes of this print have been partially obliterated by a Raccoon that happened to step on them with a forepaw. These toes have the same shape and size as the outer toes, but are adjacent.

Although one cannot rule out entirely the possibility of a domestic dog having made this print, circumstances rule against that interpretation: The only domestic dog ever seen at Newport Forest belonged to the Hurdles from 2003 to 2004, when it drowned. Also Coyotes typically travel in packs of two to four animals, sometimes more. And the trail to the river showed five or six sets of tracks, but we allow for multiple visits, with clear evidence for (only) at least two individuals.



Owl strike interrupts journey of a rodent entering the image from the right. The wings have struck the snow, leaving a print, at which point the rodent became airborne, at a guess. My own tracks appear at bottom left of this image, taken in the winter of 2005 or so.

(Below) The straddle of this Raccoon track is about 5 cm.

