

Date and time: Monday January 25 2016 2:05 - 4:40 pm.

Weather: Prec. 1 mm; RH 69%; BP 101.9 kPa; clear; S 20 kmh; T 4°C

Activity: Monitoring animal tracks and sampling trees along a transect.

The property was about 80 percent snow-covered to a depth that barely exceeded an inch. Very often we encountered little open areas around the bases of trees, where heat absorption by bark re-radiated warmth into the surrounding ground. Open areas had less snow cover than forested areas.



Our first tracking challenge involved a human visitor. Time for Sherlock Holmes: “Come here, Watson! See this footprint. I would say a male with a peculiar gait, toes turned somewhat out. And look over here, where the track emerges from the forest. Drag marks show tiredness, perhaps an older person.” The mystery was resolved later, when images of that person showed up on Trail Cam #1 at The Hole.

The Lower Meadow had a greater percentage of cover than the Upper Meadow, being almost entirely snow-covered and generously supplied with tracks: Humans, Virginia Deer, Eastern Cottontails and ones that appeared to be made by Meadow Voles and White-footed Mice. No Raccoon tracks showed up, although Trail Cam #2 showed Raccoons on the Fleming Creek Trail.

On the first foray, I went out to record tracks around the trailer, finding the above species. Meanwhile Pat was watching a flock of some 20 American Robins busily

flying and clucking on ground and branches. Would they have been interested in Winter Stoneflies? Pat thinks she saw one on the snow near the Nook. Near the Hole, I found an interesting track of an Eastern Cottontail, with a bowl-shaped depression behind them. Was the rabbit resting on its haunches?

On the second foray I went alone up the track toward the Upper Meadow. I searched for tracks in a small wooded clearing we call The Copse. On the way back, I ran into what looked like a Vole run, but it just seemed too narrow for our fat little Voles.

On the third foray, Pat and I walked into the Blind Creek Forest. We were curious about the composition of tree species in that part of the property. Setting up a north/south transect which Pat kept us on, I faithfully recorded the species of all trees of ≥ 5 inch diameter at breast height (dbh) and their general condition. The results somewhat dismayed me. Almost every tree was a Black X Walnut, as Jane Bowles used to call them. How did that happen? Theory: The Newport brothers clear cut the easily accessible trees on the property first, say 50 years ago. Seeking more lucrative timber, they began to cut in the Riverside Forest, but that meant skidding the logs by tractor over the river bluffs to get the wood out, far more arduous than cutting in the Blind Creek Forest. There, a few Black Walnuts shed their normal plenitude of nuts and the rest is history. The sprouting walnut saplings poisoned the ground, inhibiting most of the other species.

In the Lower Meadow we have lost many of the valuable native species planted there to Juglone poisoning. The only trees still thriving in the vicinity of a giant Black Walnut at the edge of the field are the Redbud and the Catalpa, both known to be juglone-tolerant. We shall continue to remove walnut saplings from the Lower Meadow as part of the management of the regeneration project begun in the year 2001.

Birds: (5)

American Crow (EW); American Robin (FCB); Dark-eyed Junco (GF); White-breasted Nuthatch (GF); Wild Turkey (BCF).

Note: Again, we have stopped seeing Black-capped Chickadees altogether, along with Downy, Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. However, birders have seen them elsewhere on the property.

Phenology: Snow cover of property about 1" and partial

Bootprint Mystery Solved: Among the many images stored in Trail Cam #1 at the Hole, was a picture of Pete Chapman out for a stroll on the land. We followed him to the river (so to speak), where he turned around and came out again. Pete and Mhairi McFarlane carried out the Christmas Bird Count on site a few weeks ago.

Readers Write:

Maria Gitta, a nature lover in London writes, “Those coyotes look like German Shepherds to me!!!”

Heather Greenwood, another London nature lover, writes, “Those coyotes look like german shepherd cross. The ears are large??? Great Trail Cam captures. The Wild Turkey shots are amazing too.”

Mairi (“Va’-ree”) McFarlane, a Conservation Biologist with Nature Conservancy Canada, writes, “These look like German Shepherd dogs to me.” Mhairi kindly sent along a link for readers to learn about the genetics of Coyotes (*Canis latrans*), Wolves (*Canis lupus*), and Domestic Dogs (*Canis familiaris*). (See IMAGES.)

<<http://theconversation.com/yes-eastern-coyotes-are-hybrids-but-the-coywolf-is-not-a-thing-50368>>

Patty Frank, a nature lover in San Diego, alerts us to a giant Walking Stick that everyone thought was extinct. “Thought you'd enjoy this wonderful critter!”

<http://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2012/02/24/147367644/six-legged-giant-finds-secret-hideaway-hides-for-80-years?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=20160117>

Catching up:

Readers who would like to read past issues of the *Bulletin* are welcome to visit the archive at <<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/>> Scroll to the bottom.

IMAGES:



This could be the run of a rather small Meadow Vole or, possibly, the run of a Short-tailed Shrew. They dive under the snow for covert travel. Meadow Voles usually line their runs with grass. Shrews do not. In fact, Shrews are not even rodents, but insectivores. Newport Forest has populations of both Meadow Voles (*Microtis pensylvanicus*) and Short-tailed Shrews (*Sorex brevicauda*).



Measurements of straddle and stride (18-20n cm) of these tracks are consistent with those of a Long-tailed Weasel — such as the one that has been living in the trailer. Weasels typically progress in leaps, as here, with hind feet landing just ahead of where the fore feet were.



Source: Dallas Trinity Trails

Photographed in Texas, these animals, alleged to be “coyotes”, have very dark fur on their backs, like the “coyotes” caught by a trail cam in the previous *Bulletin*. Seen from the rear, they would look rather like German Shepherds. However, they could easily be the result of interbreeding with a German Shepherd somewhere along the way. In taxonomic terms the domestic dog, in spite of all the various breeds, is actually considered to be a sub-species of wolf: *Canis lupus familiaris*.

At risk of turning The Bulletin into a tabloid, replete with lurid imagery, we include the following image that turned up during a search of the web for trail cam photos. Where is Holmes when you need him?



Readers are invited to exercise their forensic talents by venturing an explanation of what or who made this image. Is it

- a) a creature from outer space? (exobiology)
- b) an unknown species from our own planet? (cryptobiology)
- c) a faked image, possibly photoshopped? (pathobiology)

If you opt for c), we request that your explanation include a plausible method for producing such an image.

(With apologies for any sleepless nights this may cause; it was just so funny, we couldn't resist!)