

**Date and time:** Sunday March 19 2017 1:45 - 5:20 pm.

**Weather:** Pr 75 mm; RH 75%; BP 102.7 kPa; overcast; calm; T 5°C.

**Contents:** We clean the main trail, visit vernal ponds and collect fungi.

The property was unexpectedly wet with snow and rain that I missed seeing in weather reports. I therefore exercised caution by parking in the Upper Meadow and walking in to the trailer. I had come with assistant Will Cable to follow Pat's advice: it would be a good day to walk the main trail to assess its condition and do what clearing we could. The snow was wet, slumping, and becoming distinctly hazardous for trail walkers, with a slip threatening every step.



Some of the vernal ponds in the Blind Creek Forest are slowly charging.

Along the way, we were constantly clearing small branches and twigs from the trail, stopping to clear what we could at each deadfall site. Our first stop was at the Elbow, where two trees had fallen across the trail a few months ago. One of the trees was an Elm which had split open (from the base up to the break) in the process of falling over. We peeked inside the hollow to find an apartment building deep inside the tree. It was a remnant heartwood core literally laced with boreholes. The core came out easily by hand, giving me a "Poor Yorick" moment as I contemplated the many eye-like holes in the structure: Which came first, the beetles or the fungi? Did the fungi invade first, softening the wood for beetles or did the beetles come first, giving easy access to hyphae following boreholes? Or was it a joint invasion?

Before we arrived at the river, Will found two fungi which he brought to my attention. One was a *Poria*-like crust, the other was a possible *Trametes*, sporting an array of small white brackets down the length of a dead sapling. “What’s that?” asked Will. We had just heard what sounded to me like the call of a Tundra Swan. Then we heard Canada Geese calling, followed by a Wood Duck (possibly the source of the swanlike call).

Climbing the river bluffs trail, we followed Wild Turkey tracks nearly to the top, where Will spotted two more fungi. One looked like Witch’s Butter (*Exidia glandulosa*), but turned out to be *Exidia crenata* (with thanks to Prof. Greg Thorn), the other was a mysterious green bracket overgrown with algae, it seemed. Following the River Bluffs Trail, we were blocked once again by a tree needing the TLC of a chainsaw. Often we had to devise alternative routes around deadfall, making the trek even more adventurous.

Perhaps we now know why birds have been absent from our feeders all winter. I clearly heard a Red-bellied Woodpecker’s hoarse call, as well as the clucking of an American Robin coming from the direction of the river. Then a White-breasted Nuthatch added to the mix with its “yank-tank” call. Later a flight of seven Canada Geese passed overhead, screened by the canopy of branches overhead.

I found that climbing the Hogsback was somewhat taxing, so I was grateful for the need for frequent stops, including the encounter with a very large Ash tree over the trail, along with what appeared to be the trunk of a Butternut Hickory. A luxuriant growth of Turkeytail fungus grew at the base of the Ash. Further along the Hogsback ridge, Will spotted a “really big bird” clinging to the side of a tree. Then came a familiar shriek and I could add Pileated Woodpecker to the list. It must be remarked how well Will acts as my ears and eyes on the trail. His next find was a large stick nest in the crotch of a tree about 25 feet off the ground, presumably made by a raptor. (See the message from bird expert Dave Martin in the IMAGES section of this Bulletin.)

We descended the Hogsback gingerly as the slope was steep and the slushy snow quite slippery. I frequently did a hand-over-hand with the cooperation of saplings and young trees by the trail. Back on level ground in the Blind Creek Forest, we encountered two sets of vernal ponds, now forming for the coming amphibian chorus, my favourite sign of spring. Here too we encountered more deadfall, noting size and position in a list destined for the TTLT Property Management Committee.

Finally we were back at the Elbow, where I changed the sd card on the tripod-based Cam 2. Then on to the Hole where I changed the sd card on tree-mounted Cam 1. Only when we got back to the trailer could I change the sd card on the tree-mounted Cam 3 overlooking Fleming Creek. While I was doing that, Will actually spotted birds at the feeder, a Cardinal and a Blue Jay.

Getting out of the property was a white-knuckle affair, with wheels spinning and walls of water and mud flying in all directions, With the help of my all-terrain (offroad) tires, we made it out!

**Birds: (8)**

American Robin (RSF/TR); Blue Jay (GF); Canada Goose (RSF); Northern Cardinal (GF); Pileated Woodpecker (HB); Red-bellied Woodpecker (RSF); White-breasted Nuthatch (RSF); Wood Duck (TR). (That's better!)

**Phenology** (from trail cam records): a light snowfall on March 3 was followed by a heavier one on March 15. River is over the clay beach, creek running normally.

**Trail Cam Report:**

With no less than three trail cams now up and running, I could construct a timeline of sorts that gave the sequence of which animal appeared before which camera at what time. In all we got animal images in the following numbers: Virginia Deer 25; Raccoons 9; Wild Turkeys 7; Coyotes 3; Eastern Cottontails 1.

**Winter Report:**

This would be a natural time to assess the winter now officially behind us. In the December 21 issue of The Bulletin we wrote, “. . . we therefore expected rather nasty winters, starting with 2013-14 and 2014-15. . . This winter should pick up the thread, if the theory holds, to produce a more severe winter.”

Indeed, this year's Canadian winter could hardly have been more severe. With the exception of 5% of the country's land area (SW Ontario), there was a snow in Victoria BC (Canada's "Sun Parlour") for the first time in decades, heavy snow and unseasonably cold temperatures across BC and the entire prairies, heavier-than-normal snow in northern Ontario and Quebec, not to mention record snow-falls and ice-storms in the maritimes that cut power to several communities for a month. It would seem that Canada may have a new Sun Parlour.

**IMAGES:**

(Cam 1 - upper): A Coyote ponders Harvey's Beanfield, just across the lot line,  
(Cam 2): How the Virginia Deer got its other (more common) name, "White-tail."







Bird Expert Dave Martin kindly passed along these comments about the stick nest we found up on the Hogback (excerpted):

“This nest appears large enough to be a Bald Eagle nest. It could be a "teenager" building its first test nest or perhaps a new pair in the area or perhaps the existing territorial pair trying a new location. Eagles often have an accumulation of 2 to 4 nests in their territory. They may switch from year to year or even in one year if the starting nest is damaged in a wind or ice storm. Most Osprey and Great Blue Heron’s nests tend to be on the tops of trees for easier access so I doubt that this nest is an Osprey or Great Blue Heron nest. Trees with a suitable structure of branches for building the initial platform for eagles are scarce and much coveted by other eagles which leads to takeover attempts that may even result in battles to the death or serious injury. Interestingly males fight males and females fight females so if a young male is ready to breed he may attack an older male that has a territory.

“I think that this nest is too big to be a Red-tailed Hawk nest, as well. It seems too messy and bulky. The bulkiness and size of branches suggest an eagle. The messiness suggests an inexperienced bird. For example, there doesn't appear to be a platform yet. Raptor nests look like teacups with a rounded bottom and flat upper side.”