

Date and time: Monday February 6 2016 2:10 - 4:25 pm

Weather: Pr 8 mm; RH 97%; BP 101.2 kPa; sun/haze; calm; T 3°C

Contents: Tracking birds & mammals in snow.

The ground was frozen and firm, the snow cover thin, as we drove in. The sun was out, a perfect day for tracking animals — such as this Coyote caught in Cam #1 on the 29th of January. This time around we had no verifiable Coyote tracks, but



plenty of others to keep us busy. Before setting out I busied myself setting up a third trail camera (referred to henceforth as Cam #3). It was attached to a tree on the creek bluffs and given a down-tilt to catch the ford at the Fleming Creek rapids. Later in this *Bulletin* I will summarize the trail cam harvest of imagery.

My companion for the day was Brian. We walked out to the river to check on conditions there. The current was higher than normal, fast-moving and largely ice-free except for a succession of curiously rounded flows parading by. (See IMAGES.) Before leaving the Landing area, we were treated to the sight of a Great Blue Heron flying upriver. Among the tracks we found were those of the Eastern Grey Squirrel, Raccoon, Virginia Deer, Wild Turkey, American Crow (possibly a Blue Jay) and a (likely) Meadow Vole. Emerging from the Blind Creek Forest I decided to track a young Raccoon that had passed through the Hole where Cam #1 is posted. The tracks followed the trail toward the base camp, often becoming lost in open grassy stretches but then re-appearing in snow-covered areas. Just short of the

Nook, the tracks veered off to the left, forcing me to follow them through a tangle of bushes and low thorn trees. Ouch! They were now at the edge of the creek bluffs and clearly headed downward. Unfortunately at this point they entered an extensive zone of leaf litter warmed by a southern exposure and completely snow-free. Going for a drink at the creek? This was the only animal I had time to follow, the rest of the session being devoted to searching. We came upon a set of older tracks of paired paw prints. They were badly badly wind-eroded and partially filled in. The prints were barely discernible as canine in appearance and the paired gait reminded me of how Coyotes sometimes double-register their tracks (in deeper snow), leading me to guess at that particular animal.

The art of tracking consists of two phases: track identification (What animals made the track) and tracking proper. (What the animal was up to). Sometimes I had to take careful closeups of tracks for later analysis at home with the aid of several books on the subject, not to mention helpful websites.

Trail Cam Report

Cams #1 and #2 between them provided a wealth of imagery that I can only summarize in list form; Cam #1: Coyote (as in cover image), Virginia Deer, Raccoon; Cam #2: Virginia Deer, large flock of Wild Turkeys, Coyote on the run (a blur). Some older imagery had lingered on the sd card for this camera dating back to January when it had been mounted in the Black Maple in the Nook and aimed at the feeder. It picked up a Virginia Possum that spent a certain amount of time trying to eat the camera. It also caught what appeared to be a Southern Flying Squirrel out to check the feeder at night. This image was followed by several images of a Raccoon in its flying squirrel hunting posture, standing on hind legs, flat against the tree and with paws outstretched to grab the little critter as it descended to the feeder.

Readers Write:

Once again today we saw no birds whatever at our seed-filled feeder tray mounted up in the Black Maple. Ron Martin, a longtime friend of Newport Forest writes, "I find the absence of birds to be really disturbing."

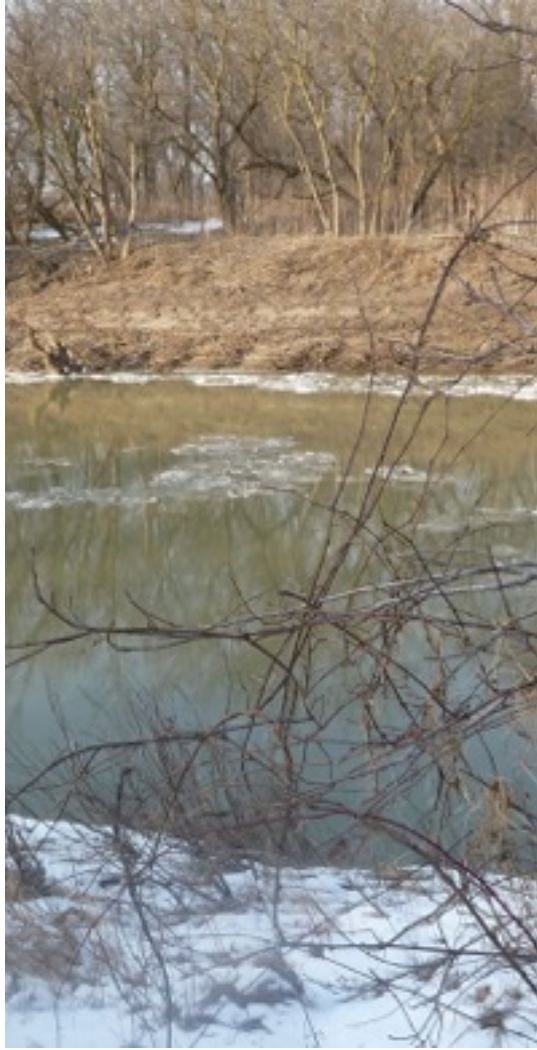
Next Issue — focus on urban ecology:

We examine London's water supply system. from Lake Huron to your tap.

IMAGES:



(Upper) Possible Meadow Vole tracks head from trailer to the Regen Zone in the Lower Meadow - hopping. (Lower) Eastern Gray Squirrel squatting on hind legs to look around. Right track partially infilled.



Southern bank of river receives full sun and is now snow-free. Our side, being in the shade, remains snow-covered. Meanwhile, ice cakes parade sedately past, each with a strangely rounded shape, as in the telephoto shot below.

I had to guess how they got that way but, as Brian might say, “I ain’t telling.” Readers are free to take a stab at our first eco-puzzle of 2017. How did they end up looking like what Pat described as “frozen lily pads”?

