

Date and time: Tuesday February 15 2022 1:55 - 4:10 pm

Weather: Pr 68 mm; RH 53%; BP 103.5 kPa; cloud/sun; winds calm; T -2° C.

Contents: Tracking on hard snow and a visit from a fox.



I was looking forward to a free ride into the property, thanks to Steve's tractor, which laughs at poor traction. However the ground was frozen so hard, that my Escape had no trouble getting down to the camp independently. It was comforting to hear my tool box rattle on the way in, thanks to the hard bumps on the ground.

Temperatures in the minus teens over the course of many nights had formed a crust so hard that Steve and I both found ourselves walking on the crust, only rarely breaking through to the softer snow beneath. The snow, in any case, was only a few inches deep. yet the hard crust meant that there would be very few useable prints to record, the only exception being deer which left many prints.

We sat in the Nook to drink some lukewarm coffee and to discuss plans for the day. Steve remarked that he had seen a quantity of blood on the snow on his way in. He thought it was probably the discharge of a female Coyote preparing for the breeding season. On our way to the Hole, Steve pointed out more blood, a small one-cm patch inside a deer hoof-print. "Must have stepped on something sharp." At the Hole I changed the sd card in the trail cam posted there (little suspecting that the card I retrieved contained a new treasure). My heart sank as we set out along the Blind Creek Trail to the river. Most of the older prints had been eroded by the January thaw and now left cryptic rounded holes with a suggestion of paws inside. The result was that even better-preserved tracks led to debate about the

animal involved. Some tracks were clearly made by Raccoons while others were made by Eastern Grey Squirrels, Eastern Cottontails or Wild Turkeys.

We were challenged by tracks belonging to the canine family. Probable Coyotes mixed with smaller Fox-like prints. (“Good luck with that,” I thought) Animal tracks are often accompanied by other signs such as scat or urine markings. I pointed out one to Steve. “Pee-break?” I asked. “Nope.” It was a squirrel working away at a walnut husk to get at the meat inside. Walnut juice had left a yellow stain on the snow. (The same juice is used as a yellow dye by native artists.) At another point I sighted a clear deer trail heading off into the bush. “Nice tracks”, I remarked, to which Steve replied, “Yes, it was a doe.” He pointed to a small pile of scat beside one of the prints. Female deer leave a pile of small, rounded pellets, while male deer leave larger, irregular pellets.

When we got to the river, we didn’t linger for long in spite of brilliant sunlight illuminating the banks and lighting up the snow-covered ice on the river. The only open reach exposed the rapids downstream, where faster water defeated ice formation. (See the cover image above.)

If we were probably right about most of the rounded tracks having no extended toes being those of Coyotes, that population would seem to be on the increase, an impression to be borne out later by trail cam imagery. In our wrap session back at camp, I clean forgot to tell Steve my new theory about the lack of birds at our feeders over the last several years. Was there not a family of weasels living in the trailer over that time — with many annual broods? Were weasels not expert tree-climbers? Were weasels not total predators? Were birds not just the right size for a weasel lunch?

We left the property around 4 pm, but ended by spending nearly half an hour trying to fix the gate which had come off its lower hinge. Steve seems to have had a low opinion of the locals who had installed it.

Readers Write

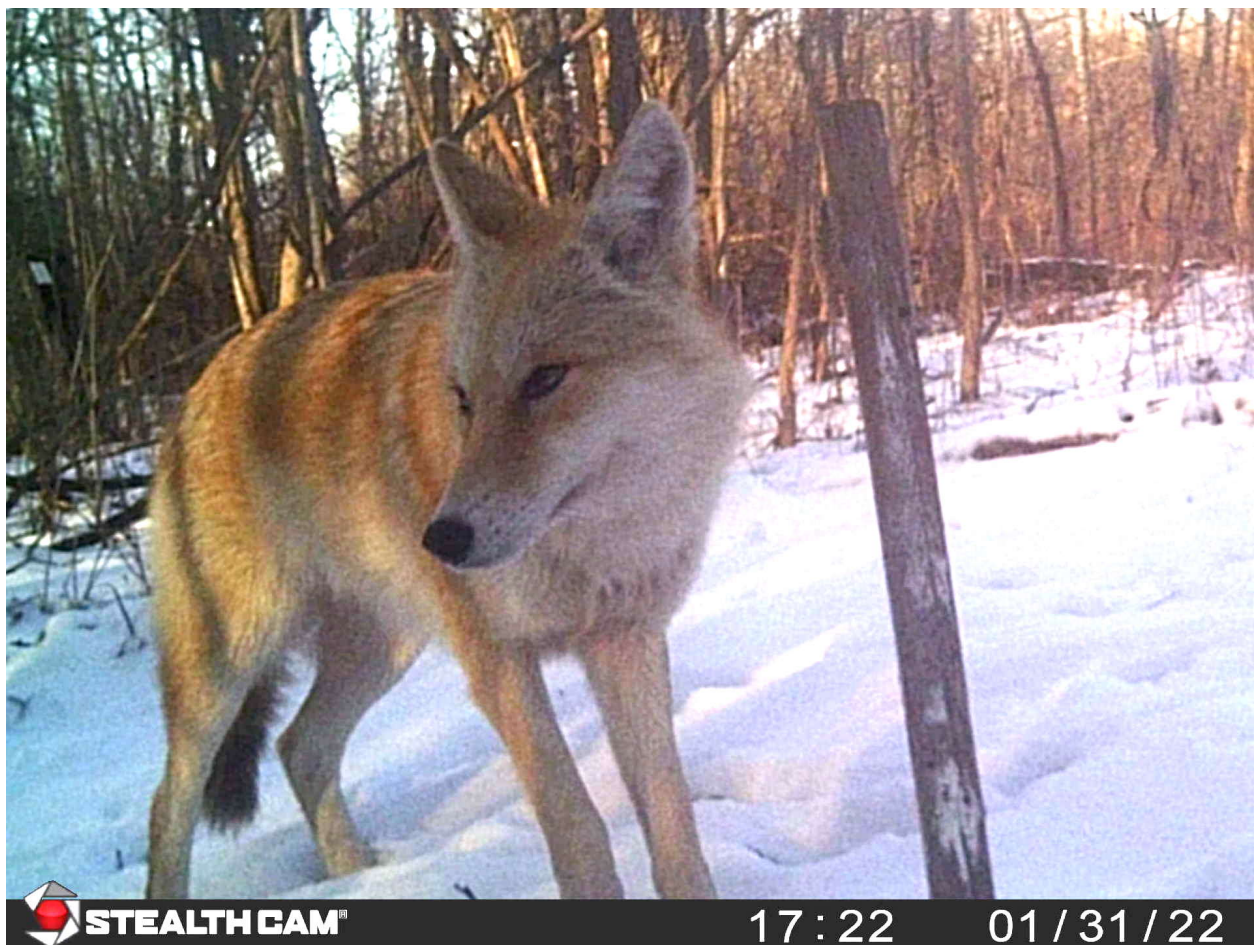
Dave Skinner, a local naturalist: “I just want to let you know that I enjoy reading your reports. Always fun. Perhaps this summer you might consider letting me tag along on one of your treks on the property. Have a good winter.

Rebecca Smythe, a local naturalist: “Amazing to see the coy-wolf (more wolf than coyote?), or husky on the lam (?) from your trail-cam. Someone on the Kilally trail

yesterday confirmed that during lockdown there was a confirmed lynx recorded on someone's trailside cam mounted on his property next to the ESA.”

Patty Frank, a nature lover in San Diego: “I enjoyed the Bulletin...loved the Mantis image...beautiful wings...and the ‘heavily built Coyote’ could be a Coywolf - you have ‘em in your neck a the woods for sure - <https://eco-chick.com/meet-coywolf-north-americas-new-coyote-wolf-species/> & <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/meet-the-coywolf-infographic-a-field-guide-to-the-coywolf-or-eastern-coyote/8663/>”

Image Gallery



This Red Fox, which showed up on January 31, was the first Red Fox ever captured by our trail cams. Pat had our first visual sighting of one in November of 2012. Feet and back of ears show reduced darkening.



This Coyote passed the camera on February 2. Subsequent frames show it becoming excited about something in a tree above it, probably a bird.



Mystery in the snow. The hoof print of a young deer has a drop of blood in it, as though the animal had an injured foot. To the right of that is the track of a feline that is definitely larger than a house cat. The most reasonable candidate would be a Canadian Lynx. The paw print is surrounded by a dark ring of re-frozen meltwater. The heel pad is to the left and four toes may be numbered from top to bottom as T1, T2, T3, and T4. The print is nearly 2 inches wide, while domestic cats rarely exceed a dainty-looking 1 inch.

The difference between feline and canine paw prints is made clear in the next page.

Meanwhile, is there a connection between the possible wound of the deer and the near presence of a track that belongs to a predator (that is unlikely to be able to take down even a young deer). Is the near adjacency of the tracks a complete coincidence or is there a story here that cannot be read? (There IS a solution for those who look closely.)



Here is a typical canine print, probably a Coyote. We number the toes here, as well, from top to bottom T1, T2, T3, T4. The heel pad, though slightly indistinct, is to the left. Notice how the toes pair up, with T1 and T4 forming an outer pair and the inner toes forming another pair. Next, note how the pairs can be separated by a dark 'X'-mark. That X simply does not appear in any feline track, as with the track on the previous page.



Typical deer tracks outlined in light surface snow.



Who has seen a face so fair
As on this Wild Turkey shows,
In endless search for acorns
Beneath the winter snows?

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