

Wild Times At Pine Hill Park

Fall, 2018 Summary

The first official day of fall found a cold wind coming down from the North, helping migrating birds continue their flights southward. Scurrying about the forest could be found black-throated blue warblers, black-throated green warblers, yellow warblers, blue jays, crows, white-breasted nuthatches, black-capped chickadees, and a solitary vireo. At the ponds you could find a belted kingfisher, a single osprey perched near its nest, a double-crested cormorant, spotted sandpiper, and wood ducks. A pair of black water snakes was also seen sunning themselves on the shore of Rocky Pond. Very happy to see all 50 American Chestnut trees were doing very well.

Last reported sighting of an osprey at Muddy Pond was on Sept. 24th. It is with great anticipation that we look forward to the return of nesting osprey next spring to Muddy Pond. Will they once again successfully nest and produce healthy fledglings as they did this year?

A walk through the forest on Oct. 6th found numerous gray squirrels and chipmunks busy collecting and storing acorns and other seeds, black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, a vireo, blue jay, small flock of tufted titmouse, and hermit thrush. At Muddy Pond you could see wood ducks, a double-crested cormorant, and at least 1000 Canada geese resting during their migration south. A peregrine falcon was seen perched in a tree at Muddy Pond, a first for me! What a magnificent looking bird. Black water snakes were still seen on the shores of Rocky Pond. The fall foliage was a disappointment this year. Our area just didn't have the rains, and frosty nights early in the fall so needed for a good fall foliage. Warm temperatures seemed to hold on for the longest time this fall.

The first significant frost didn't occur until Oct. 14th. On that day I saw hermit thrush, blue jays, black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatch and hairy woodpeckers. I also came across 2 barred owls at Rocky Pond. And at Muddy Pond, you could still see wood ducks and over a thousand Canada geese.

On Nov. 11th, one would find the forest floor covered in leaves, and the forest very quiet. I observed but a few gray squirrels, black-capped chickadees, and white-breasted nuthatches. I started my walk at 4PM, and by the time I returned to the parking lot a little after 5PM, it was already getting quite dark.

On Nov. 17th, the park floor was covered with a few inches of snow, and where there was no snow, you would find a thick layer of oak (mostly red oak) leaves. Only a few birds were observed including a red-tailed hawk, black-capped chickadee, crows, tufted titmouse, and white-breasted nuthatch. Once again, the forest was very quiet. Very typical for this time of

year. Beaver activity at Rocky Pond has been increasing the last few years. Trees felled by beaver, can now be found at least 100 meters from the water's edge. Muddy Pond was completely frozen over, and most of Rocky Pond, with the exception of a small area of open water around the Eastern side beaver den, and the outlet into Muddy Pond. I was surprised to see a Red Squirrel near the rocky ledges under the powerlines on Carriage trail. They are not anywhere near as common as the gray squirrel in the park. Also, on this day I observed an amazing number of snow flies(midges) flying throughout the park. Never had I seen so many, so late in the season.

The first week of Dec., once again found the forest very quiet with only a few birds observed including, black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatch, a flock of tufted titmouse and crows flying overhead. There was about an inch of snow on the ground, and lots of deer tracks everywhere in the forest. Rocky Pond was solidly frozen over with only a small patch of open water near the east side den and a narrow path in the outlet.

By Dec. 8th, most of the snow was gone, with only small patches left here and there. It was a beautiful sunny day, but cold. On my walk through the forest I saw only 2 gray squirrels and one hairy woodpecker. A few days later, I sprayed the American chestnut trees with deer repellent to protect them from deer browsing in the months ahead, and was not surprised to see that Rocky Pond was covered by a thin layer of water formed by the recent warm days. Both Hairy and Red-bellied woodpeckers were seen along with a barred owl near Trail Marker #24. Very quiet in the forest.

If you would like me to include any interesting or unusual wildlife sightings you have made at Pine Hill Park, please email such sightings to me, at: testill@cksrutland.org I'll be sure to include them in my seasonal summaries along with your name.

That's all for this issue. Please stay on the trails, and enjoy your special time at Pine Hill Park.