

Field Journal

29 June 2011

Arrived in Ketchikan, Alaska.

1 July

Poor weather didn't allow us to start the Alpine Survey on schedule. We drove up and hiked a bit up Dude Mountain outside of Ketchikan in hopes of finding a site we could access via ground travel, but no luck. Steep hike up from the parking area and lots of snow in subalpine made it unrealistic. Saw sign of voles, possibly ermine. Scat of grouse or ptarmigan. Also saw a sow black bear with two cubs on the road on the drive up.

2 July

Relocating to Craig on Prince of Wales (POW) Island. On the ferry ride from Ketchikan to Hollis, saw a whale a ways off - probably humpback.

3 July

Still very rainy and cloudy - grounded again. Took hikes on trails along the Harris River, about halfway between Craig + Hollis. Saw numerous banana slugs of varying color morphs - from quite dark to near cream-white and with and without spots. Set 40 museum specials in the evening on a peninsula near Craig. Lots of eagle activity in the canopy above and around the trapline. Even a fish skeleton along the transect. The site appears to be second growth, but fairly old, many downed trees and some under-growth. Not alpine, but had to get traps out - tired of waiting around because of the bad weather.

4 July

Captured 10 Peromyscus keeni in the line set last night. They appeared to be concentrated in traps under more understory growth and coarse woody debris. The rest of the day we hiked at several sites near Craig to find plants underrepresented in collections from POW. ~~at~~ Nearly captured a shrew by hand in muskeg near Control Lake. Saw several black-tailed deer and sign of black bear - scat and dug-up skunk cabbage plants. Also saw sign of bear and more deer on the Trocadero trail, toward Haydau^{bus}. Also numerous banana slugs. Also, in the area surrounding the estuary we saw deer and black bear scat.

5 July

Today the weather cleared enough for us to be helicoptered into our first alpine site. The original site, above Black Bear Lake did not appear feasible from the air, so a site nearby was chosen. It is just over a ridge from the Black Bear Lake power station. We're calling it Black Lake Mountain for now, until we can see if it is named, because it is near Black Lake. Our camp is at 2600 ft, right near treeline. Below us, probably 800-1000 ft is a large area of muskeg. Still quite large snow field around us and higher on the mountain.

- Specific site location to follow soon.

6 July

Set out 100 snap traps along an elevational gradient, following the vegetation plots. 1 muscum special and 1 Victor rat trap every 20m or so. Our total elevation gain was roughly 800 ft, starting in a stand of trees and proceeding up, including across a talus slope. In many places the vegetation is too recently uncovered from snow or too young to provide much cover. Also set 1 leghold baited with sardines in hopes of ermine.

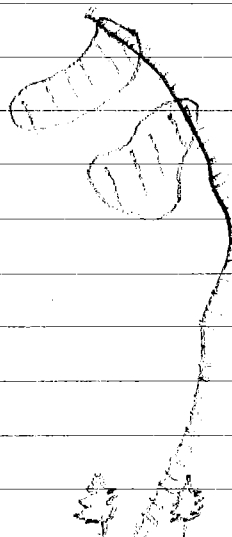
Saw lots of deer scat, vole sign (most seemed to be winter activity - not recent), and several bear scats. Also saw an indentation in the middle of a large snowfield high on the mountain with bear (what appeared to be from binoculars) scat near it. Saw 2 black-tailed deer in the evening while setting 9 pitfall traps. Karen set 116 rats/ms on a separate line.

snow traps

Talus

elevation

camp



7 July

5 captures on my line, 8 on Karen's. *Peromyscus keeni*, *Sorex monticolus*, 1 *Microtus longicaudus*. While checking my line, I set 5 more incidentals (Museum specials) and added 1 museum special to each station. Also dug 10 more pitfalls and set another ermine trap, this one in the talus. I observed a vole chewing on leaves of lupine under a protective rock outcrop, around 11:30 am.

The day was foggy off and on, very fickle weather.

8 July

Captured 23 animals between mine and Karen's lines. Mostly *Peromyscus keeni* and *Sorex monticolus*, 2 *Microtus longicaudus*. The pitfall traps seem to be especially successful - that's how I got most of my shrews. Saw a ptarmigan (willow) above camp, near the end of my trapline. Got a savannah sparrow in a snap as well. Karen got a young ptarmigan. Goose poop up high in the talus near my second ermine trap. I didn't notice it yesterday and we saw a flock of Canada geese come in last evening. Cold and very foggy most of the day - around 45°F.

9 July

Interesting trap day: 1 ermine in a rat trap, 3 shrews in a single pitfall, and 1 winter wren (possibly ^(young of year) ~~immature~~). Lots of deer sightings in the morning. Up to 8 at once. Some (at least 4-5) were on a steep ~~very~~ slope above the talus fields my traplines cross. They seem quite tame and curious.

which is surprising given the amount of human activity is evident around the area, including near our camp.

The sun came out today, bringing many more flying insects and even a hummingbird near camp. Little wind most of the day as well.

10 July

More deer and ptarmigan sightings/hearings. Both rock and willow ptarmigan. I saw a mother with one chick (willow) foraging near trap 40, above the talus. Never trapped the vole I observed. 2 snails were on or near traps I had set. Few animals captured today. I had 4, Kara 5.

Helicopter ride to Klawock was smooth, despite rain.

12 July

Arrived via helicopter to Dall Island, about 1.5 km SE of Windy Cove. Jim Baichtal gave us information on where is safe to camp and travel, due to karst. Saw many deer in the alpine from the helicopter. Our camp is in subalpine zone. Found a roughskinned newt in the pond near camp.

Took a hike to survey potential transect routes. Many more plants seem to be in bloom here than at "Black Lake Mountain" site. Saw numerous deer, including bucks in velvet, and bear scat. Heard sandhill cranes, possibly from down in a calcareous fen below the ridge we were on. Some snow left in gorges and small patches up high - many, many small ponds along the upper ridge areas.

13 July

Setting transects and traplines today. Heard sandhill cranes in camp in the early morning. Hermit thrushes singing all around, among other birds. While setting traps I saw a bear on the West side of the main ridge, through a 'notch', near Vegetation Plot 4 or 5, I think. Watched it foraging on a steep hillside below a snowfield for about 20 minutes. It then turned uphill, and began crossing the snow toward me. I went to warn the others, ~~working~~ working their way up the East side of the ridge. When I came back, the bear had begun to enter the narrow notch area at the top of the ridge. It looked large, had a bulky head, and very black fur. I clapped my hands and vocalized and it quickly turned and ~~left~~ left. This was around 11 am.

Further along the ridge I startled two sandhill cranes in a large pond. Karen later would find a vole in the first trap I had set while finishing setting her line. We finished our transect by descending the ridge into subalpine forest patches, meadows, and wetlands, including some karst areas. Saw bear scat in the meadow near the end of my line.

Temperatures were in the mid-70s today, very clear and sunny, like yesterday. In the late afternoon the fog began to roll in off the Pacific, but it is not settling in hard just yet. Karen also found a banana slug on her line.

20
~~19~~ July

Our last 2 days on Dall Island were very foggy. Trap success was decent. More voles ~~at~~ than at Black Lake Mountain, POW. No surprises as far as specimens goes. Several voles (*Microtus longicaudus*) were quite large though. Several pregnant females of all species were captured. We seemed to capture more females on Dall than on POW, where it was markedly male-biased. ~~But~~ I caught nothing in the lower sites, which included karst sinkhole areas. In the lower karst meadow of the transect there appeared to be winter sign of voles in the walls of large sinkholes (6 ft diameter, 3-4 ft. deep). We felt it was unsafe to sample in them given the meadow was probably largely hollow under the surface, as could be seen in a few holes. A bear destroyed several traps and an insect pitfall trap one night, but only once. I believe I saw a bear in the meadow the last morning in the fog. Fresh scat.

Our transect was coincident with much bear sign. Scat in numerous places, my 2 sightings, and apparent foraging areas. Especially high concentration along the uppermost part of the ridge in areas connecting either side, and in the karst meadow. A great deal of deer pellets and sightings as well.

The fog lifted just in time to fly out on the 16th in the afternoon - only had 3 trap nights. No luck with increased traps in

the subalpine forest near camp.

Etolin Island

We completed a roughly 24-hour turnaround to take advantage of good weather to fly to Etolin Island on the 17th of July. About a 35-40 minute flight, north from Ketchikan by helicopter. Passed a red-orange rock mountain on the way. Mostly barren of plants.

Lots of snow and several high lakes are still frozen over in the area. We are camped next to a small lake near 2500 ft, south of Olive Cove in the Olive Creek drainage. Camp is subalpine, with cedar, hemlock, and heather abundant. Numerous snow patches all over the place. Seems like less animal life in general than at the other 2 sites. Comparatively little sign of small mammals, bear, deer, and birds. Saw some ptarmigan pellets in snow, a few deer prints and bear scat from last year on the first day. No sign of elk, which have been introduced to Etolin Island.

Karen set a line of traps along the vegetation transect ascending the mountain to the summit and I went down, stocking mostly to Krumholtz patches - the only obvious suitable habitat here. I only set about 40 traps along the same ridge. The others were in a second transect ^{North} west of camp, encompassing wet lower areas and forest edge briefly. The topography

is intriguing. A maze of small washes and high areas weaves throughout a broad area, relatively flat. Streams and a large creek converge in a large lake below this area, steeply running down to it.

- Only 4 animals after the first night. Shrews and red-backed voles. I got 3, all on my lower transect.

I also set 10 pit falls in that area and around our camp, which is similar. Also set a few incidentals in more forested habitat, along with the two weasel traps. I heard a red squirrel chatter from a stand of trees along a large gulch, full of boulders, leading down to the large lower lake. Saw a lone deer from a distance on another ridge top from the end of our lower transect. First deer (and only so far) that any of us has seen here. I also saw a dipper along the snowbank on the large creek. It bobbed up and down a while the flow off. Later saw it in other areas nearby. A few seagulls have been spotted daily.

The weather yesterday and today was miserable - constant rain ~~and~~ and windy. Only about 45-50°F. Only 7 animals the second trap night, largely in new traps set after the first night. Finally broke this evening - it was very nice to have the sun come out a few hours to dry our gear out and boost morale.

21 July

Great weather today - sunny, warm (around 70°F) and a nice breeze to keep the bugs at bay mostly. Only 4 animals again in traps - No sign of red

squirrel either, although the central part of the tree stand was inaccessible due to steepness. Not much bird activity in the early morning, but I did see the gulls and heard a few birds singing along my lower trapline (Junco and hermit thrushes). Got 2 shrews in the same pitfall, which has happened at least once every trip so far, including 3 in one trap at Black Lake Mountain.

I made it up to Karin's trapline and the ridgetop transect. Much more alpine than my subalpine lines. Very interesting geology with granitic boulders and such. There is also gravel/sand deposits of granite formed into waves in several places - almost looks like terraced farming with veget. holding them in place. The frozen upper lake is starting to break up. Lots of snow on the slopes around though. Also seemed to be much more winter small mammal sign on the other side of the peak, beyond our transects. Possibly because it is south-facing?

It is interesting that Karin's line, the high trapline, has only produced shrews. Makes sense considering lush vegetation is relatively sparse but the insect supply is ample, I guess.

~~22 July~~
22 July Bear sighting last night around the time we were going to bed - mother and cub on the hillside above the lake across camp. They covered ground so quickly along the access to our transect - it was really astonishing. Otherwise things remained

fairly sparse concerning wildlife. ^{Did see} ~~Brown~~ a doe and fawn this morning though. Low trap numbers; shrews are the most common.

23 July

Left Etolin yesterday in the early afternoon, once the fog lifted. Helicoptered out to Wrangell then took a floatplane to Ketchikan. Got a red-backed vole in a pitfall - appears to be a subadult. I heard and Cathy saw ptarmigan near the staff of my trapline and Karin's. Also saw + heard ravens for the first time while on Etolin.

27 July

After being gounded in Ketchikan for several days we were forced to end the Alpine Survey early - not enough time to do a cycle trip. The weather here has been totally soaked in. We hiked up the trail to Duke Mountain (Brown Mtn) but it wouldnt have been feasible for a transect. We did basically the same hike when we first arrived here in July. The snow is almost entirely gone now, we passed ~~several~~ ^{a couple} brilliantly blooming meadows, and saw a blue grouse with one large chick. The young one flew to a nearby tree when we startled them, the mother tried to lead us away up the trail. We also saw banana slugs along the lower part of the trail.

On the ferry ride from Ketchikan to Hollis I saw two or three humpbacks breaching

28 July

repeatedly as the boat passed them.

Joined the ISLES (MSB) crew in Craig yesterday, today I was boated out to Dall Island to pick up and transport Brad Truett, Sadie Yuista, and Steven Grieman to Goat Island. Saw a whale breach on the ride to Dall, about $3/4$ of the ride from Craig. We relocated to Crab Trap Cove on Goat Island. Our campsite is just off a small stream where it meets the ocean in a protected notch. Steve and I set snaps and shermans ^{and pitfalls} up a transect in the forest that ascended to a boggy plateau area, then came back down the other side of the stream towards camp. Brad and Sadie trapped the coast, including flying squirrel traps. We are hearing lots of fish jumping in the water.

29 July

Quite rainy today. The others have been experiencing day after day like this and thus, aren't too excited by it, but the resupply of food and a fresh face/set of hands seems to have cheered them up. This experience seems like it will be quite different than mine with the Alps crew. Being in/trapping the forest and having the coast right nearby is much different. Focusing on mammals (not really multi-taxa) is a change of pace too. We do collect insects incidentally. Brad especially wants spiders. Steve looks at bird guts for parasites.

too; the ones incidentally captured.

The tide fluctuations are large here. Low tide exposes clams, crabs, many starfish, and mussels. We also saw a large (dinner-plate-sized) jellyfish washed up.

Plenty of bear and deer sign around. Heard hermit thrushes and saw a woodpecker-type bird in the boggy area of my trapline (sapsucker?)

The forest is Cedar-hemlock, and lots of blueberries are ripening. A history of logging seems apparent here. Lots of stumps and downed brush, but also some quite large trees still in tact as well. Banana slugs run the gamut of color morphs here and are very common when it is wet out.

Caught a *Peromyscus* and a *Sorex* in the boggy area. No luck with flying squirrel.

1 August

The last 2 nights on Goat were about the same regarding trapping. The pizza was made over the fire for dinner was a morale-booster though. We moved to a cave on the Northeast corner of Sukkwin Island today. Dense bear sign, salmon near the stream mouth, and several kingfishers were our first impression. Unfortunately there is a lot of trash and debris on the shores - maybe because of proximity to Hyalaburg?

Again Brad or Seb's trapped the coast and did squirrel sets. They got cut short by a run-in with a black bear though. If climb it

a tree then scuttled off safely. We may have seen the same one in the cove at low tide foraging. We (Steve + I) set our line up into the forest along the stream and down the other side. Good Peromyscus and shrew habitat. To guard against bear issues we are all sleeping under the large tarp together - no individual tents. We don't want to take chances in an area with such obviously high bear concentration.

4 August

The last few days on Sukkwan #1 were quite prolific. We got nearly 100 specimens - flying squirrel, shrews, mice. The weather was very nice - sunny and warm - until today. No bad bear encounters. We did see a mother and cub near camp though. Had salmon for dinner and Sandie saw a bat over the stream mouth. We set out bat nets above the small waterfall from ~ 8-10:30 but with no success.

Sukkwan site #2 is just near Blanket Island, south of site #1. We set out some pitfalls in the forest and snaps along the grassy shore. Already got 1 Microtus! Steve and I saw a harbor seal off the point. Lots of deer sign and some bear sign around. The no-seeums are pretty bad, like at the last site, too.

5 August

Low catch, but not a ton of traps out last night either. The weather cleared today - mostly sunny with a breeze. We set out many more traps. We collected a few

blueberries for pancakes at breakfast. I found an otter skull and vertebral column with ribs. The legs are all missing and the teeth loose - seems like it had been there a while. River otter.

Stere and I caught nothing in our 30 pits last night. All in the boggy wet part of the forest near the stream. Today we put in 40 more in a more xeric forest area with lots of downed logs.

We are thinking perhaps the difference in trap success is due to this site not being a salmon stream, like our first Sukkwan site. The added energy/nutrient input from the fish may increase productivity in the area?

6 August Trap success low again. Only 1 shrew in our 70 pitfalls so we put out 30 more in a 3rd area. It was live when we found it this morning around 7:30. so it must not have been in long. It was jumping, trying to get out. We have seen a couple other live shrews doing the same thing. They nearly get ^{high} enough to escape the cups which are 10-12 in deep. Pretty astonishing really. One more Microtus longicaudus today too, down along the coast in a grassy edge as is typical. Unfortunately, most of the grass/sedge on the coast is inundated at high tide, which means we do really have as much habitat to trap in as it seems. There was a group of probably almost 10 Stellar's Jays near camp this morning.

They made all sorts of sounds I had never heard from them before - very cacophonous. Weather's not bad - mostly cloudy with a chill in the air, but not raining at least.

7 August

No shrews in the 100 pitfalls we have out, but Sadio + Brad got 2 in snaps. A flying squirrel and a handful of Peromyscus. It was very clear last night - we could see all the stars. That was the first time I have seen that many up here. The clear weather stuck around through the day too. Sunny and warm today.

Salmon are jumping just off the coast, there was a dipper at water's edge by camp, and around dinner we heard a whale. We were getting a fire going and heard a couple of large-sounding crashes or rumblings and finally realized it was a whale. It swam up from the channel between Sukkwan and Blanket Isl. and continued north out of sight. It surfaced to breathe every couple hundred yards and would blow multiple times before disappearing.

A whale swam by about 9pm going the same route but opposite direction. I wonder if it was the same one?

9 August

Moved to our last site yesterday. It's on Northendall Island, just north of their first site here. Cove with a large river (that isn't flowing much now) emptying into it. Many, many salmon in the cove. Two harbor seals appear to be regulars. We have seen

some bear sign, about like normal. Last night around the campfire we heard chattering and then saw a flying squirrel land on a large tree right near by us.

Again, we split into interior forest along the river, and coastal traplines. The forest seems more typical than what we set in at Sukkwan site 2 - less wet and boggy. There is a small riparian buffer with grass, too, as well as on the coast, so we're hoping to get some *Microtus*.

Interesting rocks on the beach, ranging in color from oranges, reds, and purples, to the usual gray and brown. Dippers or some other grayish shorebirds are around the river mouth, and we saw an eagle upon arrival.

Tonight we set a bat net up the river a little ways. No bats. The sky is clear again, feels like it's going to get cold. Steve and I set out 30 more pitfalls, mostly in a xeric forest stand. We got one live shrew this afternoon and one *Peromyscus*. We also found beaver sign along the river - a dam and several chewed trees.

Also, yesterday morning we heard sandhill cranes early in the morning on Sukkwan

10 August

The weather changed today to cloudy and some rain. It was clear overnight and in the morning though. Steve and I went in search of more beaver sign up the river corridor. The water seems awfully low - lots of silt and new vegetation growth. Beaver chewed twigs and trees

are virtually everywhere. We found a very large dam which spanned nearly the whole channel. The lodge was some 15-20 ft upstream of the dam in the very large pool it created. We also found a beaver carcass that was relatively fresh. Got several carrion beetles, they are a beautiful pattern of orange and black with noticeable orange bells on the end of their antennae.

After exploring the river more we explored the coast around Sadie + Brad's trapline. It was pretty dense underbrush. We found mink ^{or marten} poop in the woods. Several small tide pools were up on the jagged, steep coastline had starfish, interesting lichens and hermit crabs.

Low catch today. No shrews. We're wondering if we would have had trapped up near the beaver ponded area simply due to possibly greater productivity in the riparian zone?

11 August

After some rain and clouds moved in last night our shrew catch went up. Nine animals. We also got a flying squirrel, which was unexpected given the rain. We saw a doe + buck deer near the beginning of the river trapline. Just like the alpine deer they were quite cautious and didn't take off for awhile. First deer I'd seen with the boat crew.

Left the island around 11am. Nearly hit a sea otter on the ride back. It didn't dive as we approached or even as we passed close to it. Arrived back in Craig and had a great lunch at the Dick's, de Diner. Cleaning traps and gear inventory is all that's left for the summer.