

Our Wildlife Is Winter Hardy

Let's face it, winter is here! And we have a little snow to prove it. Sure, it's even been a bit cold lately. While we may complain about the many trials and tribulations of winter's hardships, many of us are fortunate enough to have four walls and a roof over our heads and some sort of fuel to heat our homes. However, our wildlife persists throughout our harsh winters on much different terms. They do this by adapting to changing conditions in their environment over time. This includes long term weather patterns occurring over thousands of years and annual seasonal changes (our glorious four seasons).

These adaptations have been acquired over hundreds of thousands of years, evolving on their own



terms and in association with each other and their environments. It's basically survival of the fittest. A variety of species have developed some incredible strategies to deal with the fluctuations of our four seasons.

Many birds have developed a strategy that most of us would like to do in the winter – migrate south to warmer places with ample food supplies. However, our resident birds, such as chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers, are winter hardy and stick it out through the roughest months of the year.

Other species enter a hibernation-like state where their bodily functions slow down and they "sleep" for all or part of the winter. Turtles, snakes, frogs, and salamanders are virtually nonexistent for the whole winter, and we won't see them until they emerge from their winter slumbers in the spring. Some of

these species even stay submerged under water the whole time! Most turtles and frogs burrow in the mud at the bottom of a pond or marsh for nearly half the year. Now that's one way to deal with below freezing conditions.

Another way is to practice the art of torpor. This is a tactic that some of our mammals use this time of the year. It's not true hibernation, but it does allow certain species some down time during the winter. Black bears are the first that come to mind. They may find a winter den in a hollow tree, crevice in a pile of rocks, or simply in a pile of brush. They can emerge during warm periods in winter but are rather groggy and will eventually return to their den for the remaining part of winter. Other mammals that use the hibernation-like state of torpor include raccoons, chipmunks, skunks, and opossums. However, they tend to emerge more often than bears.

But for other mammals they remain active all winter long. Coyotes, foxes, bobcats, moose, deer, fishers, otters, weasels, hares, and porcupines are on the move in search of food and mates. In fact, winter is a great time to experience the presence of these species through observations of their various signs they leave behind – tracks in the snow, scat, scent marks, and feeding. Rarely do we actually see mammals, but their signs are more easily seen in the winter. So the next time we have a snowstorm, wait a few days, grab your favorite mammal tracking guide, and take to the woods and wetlands to learn who has been enjoying the winter wonderland. You might just be surprised at what you may find!

Jeffrey Littleton is the principal ecologist for Moosewood Ecological LLC located in Chesterfield, NH. He assists clients with conservation and land management planning, as well as native landscape design and installation. He is also adjunct faculty at Antioch University New England and board member for the Monadnock Sustainability Network, a 501c3 whose mission is to encourage sustainable living practices and resource conservation in the region.

Candle Service In Munsonville

The Chapel by the Lake in Munsonville will be holding Candle Service on Sunday, December 18th at 7 p.m. The Chapel is located at 529 Granite Lake Road and are handicapped accessible. Refreshments will follow the service. All are welcome.

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Early Sprouts Nutrition Curriculum At Keene Montessori School

Through grant funding from Advocates for Healthy Youth and a partnership with the Keene State College Nutrition program, Keene Montessori School has been able to incorporate the Early Sprouts curriculum into their school days.

Early Sprouts is a 24-week, research-based nutrition curriculum that encourages preschoolers to eat more vegetables by growing, harvesting, and preparing organically grown foods. The curriculum offers sensory exploration and cooking activities that focus on six target vegetables – tomatoes, green beans, bell peppers, Swiss chard, carrots, and butternut squash. With planning and guidance from Jillian Emerson, a Keene State nutrition student, the children at Keene Montessori School started their journey in the spring, planting their seeds in raised

garden beds on their playground. They have watched them grow, talked about each vegetable and who has tried them before, and took care of the plants. When the time came, they harvested each vegetable and have been able to explore each of them, noticing their shape, smell, taste, texture, etc. Each week the children are able to cook a tasty, healthy recipe using the target vegetables.

The response to this program from both children and parents has been wonderful. The kids are trying and enjoying the new recipes each week, and parents are reporting more enthusiasm for veggies and for trying new foods in general at home.

For more details about the Early Sprouts program, call 603-352-4052, visit www.keenemontessori.com, or stop by at 125 Railroad Street in Keene.

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Christmas At Colonial Williamsburg Is Next Meeting Of Local DAR

The Mary Varnum Platts Peterborough Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution will hold its December meeting with a potluck on Wednesday, December 14th at noon at the Jaffrey Civic Center.

The program will be a presentation on Christmas at Colonial Williamsburg.

For more details, call Sandy Siviak at 603-562-8411 or Kathy Weibel at 603-532-4259.

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