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LIVING

Silence and survival

Even in this age of warming climates, January is a deadly serious time of year. For most birds and mammals, life is a day-to-day struggle to find sufficient food to simply get through the long winter night. This is also a month where sound is the exception and silence the rule. Granted, the quiet may be broken by the styrofoam squeal of frigid snow underfoot, by the rifle shot of swollen tree fibres bursting in the cold or by the tinkling calls of a flock of finches passing overhead. But these sounds



OUR CHANGING SEASONS
Drew Monkman

are simply pauses in a world of silence. Even the high-riding January moon shines with a cold-hearted light that only accentuates the stillness of the land.

But only to the casual, hurried observer is the landscape lifeless. Troops of chickadees tirelessly peer and probe for dormant insects. Nuthatches work their way down tree trunks in a never-ending quest for food, while white-tailed deer browse quietly on saplings. The deers' grey winter hair perfectly matches the dim, grey-washed hues of the leafless hardwoods. In the distance, the hammer-like blows of a pileated woodpecker may temporarily break the silence as it excavates a resonant old maple for dormant ants.

We marvel at how each species, in its own unique way, has adapted to surviving winter. To the curious and attentive observer, there is wonder in the countless strategies used by plants and animals to withstand or retreat from the snow, wind and cold. Seen or unseen, awake or sleeping, life carries on, all around us.

The events listed below are typical of January in the Kawarthas. However, most of these happenings occur over the entire month and are not limited to any specific date. The box in front of each entry may be used to check off those events that you witness yourself.

□ **1** — In northern Peterborough County, the fishing seasons open on Jan. 1 for northern pike, walleye, brook trout, brown trout and lake trout. The splake and rainbow trout season is open all year.

□ **2** — In our forests, mixed flocks of foraging chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers bring life to the seemingly empty winter landscape.

□ **3** — The Quadrantid meteor shower peaks tonight and in the early-morning hours of Jan. 4. The point of origin is just east of the head of the constellation Draco. Unfortunately, the moon will be almost full and will wash out much of the sky.

□ **4** — Ruffed grouse often appear in silhouette as they feed at dusk and dawn on buds of aspen trees.

□ **5** — Even during the winter, woodpeckers defend feeding territories through a combination of drumming and calling. The loud "wuk-wuk-wuk" cackle of the pileated woodpecker can often be heard on winter mornings.

□ **6** — Bald eagles can sometimes be seen on Lake Katchewanooka, in the vicinity of

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Nuthatches (white-breasted, top left, and red-breasted, bottom) are among birds that bring life to the seemingly empty winter landscape. Bald Eagles (right) can often be seen in various parts of northern Peterborough County.



Karl Eggersy, special to The Examiner

Petroglyphs Provincial Park and at various dumps in northern Peterborough County.

□ **7** — Small numbers of common goldeneye and common merganser can be found all winter long on the Otonabee River and Lake Katchewanooka between Peterborough and Young's Point.

□ **8** — Small flocks of American robins overwinter in Peterborough most years. With the heavy wild fruit crop this year, robin numbers should remain quite high.

□ **9** — If the weather is mild and sunny, some species such as European starlings, white-breasted nuthatches and black-capped chickadees will occasionally break into song.

□ **10** — In early January, black bears give birth to two or three cubs no larger than chipmunks. The cubs are hairless, sightless and toothless, but flourish on the sow's rich milk.

□ **11** — Moose and white-tailed deer shed their antlers. This shows that the antlers' role as a tool of defence is minimal, since predators such as wolves pose the greatest threat during the winter months, well after the antlers have fallen.

□ **12** — Deer "yard up" in conifer swamps such as in the Peterborough Crown Game Reserve. With less and less testosterone being produced, males are not nearly as aggressive as in the fall, and form bachelor groups.

□ **13** — Coyotes continue to be quite vocal during the winter months. Howling is most pronounced before the hunt and serves to gather the pack together.

□ **14** — Mice, shrews, voles and moles remain active all winter long, as they make a living in the sub-nivean space between the earth and snow.

□ **15** — The romantic season begins for red foxes and coyotes and will last through the first half of February.

□ **16** — Bass lie dormant under logs, weeds or rocks until the light and warmth of spring restore their energy and appetite. Smallmouth bass virtually starve themselves over the winter. This is one reason why so few bass are ever caught by anglers at this time of year.

□ **17** — Anglers pursue a variety of species in winter including walleye, yellow perch, northern pike, lake trout and, in some lakes, splake and rainbow trout. However, with the exception of Lake Scugog, ice fishing in the Kawarthas is restricted to northern Peterborough County.

□ **18** — This is a period of high fish mortality, especially for young fish. During the winter months, there is a shortage of food of appropriate size such as plankton.

□ **19** — With a little searching, it is possible to find insects in various stages of their life cycle. The larvae of cattail moths, black flies and goldenrod gall flies and the

egg masses of the eastern tent caterpillar are just a few of the insects to be found.

□ **20** — Honeybees are the only insects to maintain an elevated body temperature all winter. They accomplish this by clustering together in a thick ball within the hive, vibrating their wings to provide heat and eating stored honey to provide the necessary energy.

□ **21** — Under the frozen surface of wetlands, most aquatic insects are still fairly active. Crayfish, too, continue to feed throughout the winter in our streams and rivers.

□ **22** — Evergreen woodland plants such as wintergreen and Christmas fern stand out in wind-blown areas or where the snow has melted away.

□ **23** — Because of their thick bunches of needles, conifer branches intercept and hold the falling snow. This results in far less snow reaching the ground underneath the trees.

□ **24** — White spruce cones retain large quantities of ripe seed over the winter. This makes the white spruce a favourite food source of winter finches such as crossbills.

□ **25** — Twigs and buds merit special attention at this time of year. Because their characteristics are different for each species of tree, quick and accurate identification can be made on this basis.

□ **26** — During evening twilight, the sky is often purple-mauve in

the east and red-pink in the west.

□ **27** — Our lakes are at a uniform 4 C except just below the ice surface, where the water is near the freezing point.

□ **28** — We become aware of the lengthening days. Most of the daylight is gained at the end of the day in January rather than in the morning. In fact, in the first week of January, dawn begins at its latest for the entire year.

□ **29** — The winter sky provides a great opportunity to become familiar with the Big Dipper, Little Dipper and Cassiopeia. They are the starting points for learning the other constellations.

□ **30** — The Winter Six and their assortment of bright stars light up January evenings. Look for the constellations Orion, Taurus, Gemini, Auriga, Canis Major and Canis Minor.

□ **31** — The early-winter full moon rides higher in the sky than at any other season and passes nearly overhead at midnight. Coupled with the reflective quality of snow, moonlit winter nights shine with an unforgettable brilliance.

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