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LIVING

A cold, snowy, lively month

Nature is still active in January if you know what to look for . . . and where

"Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow."

Robert Frost, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Awake or sleeping, life is still all around us, even in January. It just takes a little more work to see and appreciate. More than any other month, we marvel at how each species in its 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, this, the cruelest of times.



Drew Monkman

OUR CHANGING SEASONS

The events listed below are typical of January in the Kawarthas. However, many of these happenings occur over the entire month and are not limited to any specific date.

- 1 - In the first week of January, sunrise is later than at any other time of the year. In fact, the sun doesn't peek over the horizon until 7:49 a.m. Compare this to June 20 when the sun rises at 5:29!

- 2 - In our woodlots, mixed flocks of foraging chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers bring life to the seemingly empty winter landscape. These birds are very receptive to pishing and the chickadees, in particular, can usually be coaxed to come in quite close.

- 3 - The numbers of some winter birds fluctuate widely from year to year. These species are referred to as winter "irruptives," and the years in which they are particularly common are called "flight years." Last winter was an excellent flight year for pine siskins. The only winter irruptive present this year in good numbers is the bohemian waxwing.

- 4 - Watch for ruffed grouse at dawn and dusk along tree-lined country roads. They often appear in silhouette as they feed on the buds of trees such as the trembling aspen.

- 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 sometimes be heard on winter mornings. There is at least one pileated woodpecker in Peterborough this winter in the vicinity of Barnardo and Wolsely streets.

- 6 - Bald eagles can sometimes be seen on Lake Katchewanooka, in the area of Petroglyphs Provincial Park and along the Otonabee River. They also turn up quite regularly around Little Lake.

- 7 - Watch for small numbers of common goldeneyes, common mergansers, and black ducks all winter long on the Otonabee River between Rice Lake and Lakefield. Some birds can usually be seen at Young's Point, as well.

- 8 - Small flocks of American robins overwinter in Peterborough every year. There have already been a number of reports this winter of robins gorging themselves on the fruit of crabapple trees and European buckthorn.

- 9 - If you're driving through open farm country, keep an eye open for



KARL EGRESSY photo

Snow buntings, which can gather in flocks of several hundred birds in open farm fields at this time of year.



KARL EGRESSY photo

White-tailed deer will congregate in 'deer yards' to find food as winter deepens.

huge, swirling flocks of snow buntings. It is not uncommon to see hundreds of these white birds in a single flock.

- 10 - Beavers are mating this month and next. To tell whether a lodge is active, look for a dark hole at the top where the snow has been melted away by the body warmth of the occupants inside.

- 11 - White-tailed deer shed their antlers sometime between late-December and early March. Antlers are temporary projections of bone that are grown and discarded each year. Although a buck's antlers are used primarily for sparring with opponents during the fall rut, they also serve to dig in early snows in search of food.

- 12 - As snow deepens, white-tailed deer move into "deer yards." These are often cedar swamps that offer easily accessible food as well as shelter from storms and deep snow. The largest deer yard in our area is the Peterborough Crown Game Reserve, just north of Stony Lake.

- 13 - Coyotes are quite vocal during their January to March mating season. The young are born 60-63 days later, usually in a ground den. Unlike the wolf or domestic dog, coyotes run with their

tail pointing down.

- 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. A couple of feet of snow can make a remarkable temperature difference: -20 C above the snow and 0 C beneath!

- 15 - Jupiter will remain visible in the evening until mid-February. Look to the southern sky.

- 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 caught by anglers at this time of year.

- 17 - Porcupines often take up residence in a large eastern hemlock, tamarack or pine and will spend the winter munching away on the inner bark of the branches. Because of their short legs, porcupines must avoid expending too much energy travelling through deep snow from one tree to another.

- 18 - Red squirrels use tunnels under the snow that often lead to food stashes. During very cold weather, the squirrels remain in these tunnels.

- 19 - With a little searching, it is pos-



DREW MONKMAN photo

A pileated woodpecker leaves its mark on a tree trunk.

sible to find moths and butterflies overwintering in all four stages of the life cycle. The mourning cloak butterfly overwinters as an adult, the Isabella moth as a larva (the well-known woolly bear caterpillar), the tiger swallowtail butterfly as a pupa (chrysalis), and the eastern tent caterpillar moth as an egg.

- 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 ponds, countless immature insects - larvae and nymphs - remain active. These include fierce, carnivorous dragonfly nymphs and the ingenious larvae of the caddisfly. The latter use bits of plants and gravel to construct cases around their bodies, seemingly for protection.

- 22 - Occasionally, barred owls show up in rural backyards and prey on care-less feeder birds or on mice that are attracted by night to fallen seeds under the feeder. This round-headed, hornless owl often stays for days at a time and can be quite tame.

- 23 - A walk through a snow-covered field or along a roadside will afford you a close look at the skeletons of asters and goldenrods. Watch for a ball-like gall growing on the goldenrod stem. It contains the tiny, white larva of the goldenrod gall fly.

- 24 - The cones of red and white pine drop to the ground all winter long. The seeds, however, were already released in the fall.

- 25 - Because their characteristics are different for each species, quick and accurate tree identification can be made on the basis of the twigs and buds alone. It can be fun and instructive to make a winter twig collection and to note how the buds are different in size, shape, colour, and arrangement on the twig. A few species, like maple and ash, have buds that are arranged opposite each other on the twigs, but the majority of trees have buds that are staggered alternately.

Oak and birch are good examples of the latter.

- 26 - 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.

- 27 - With mating season starting, red foxes become more active. It's quite common to spot their straight-lined trails, even in suburban backyards. Occasionally we see foxes hunting for mice and voles at dusk or dawn.

- 28 - In January, black bears give birth to cubs no larger than chipmunks. Generally, two cubs are born, although there are sometimes as many as four or five. The amount of food available in the fall is critical in determining the number of young in the litter, or even if the sow will give birth at all. The cubs will stay with their mother for 16 to 17 months.

- 29 - We start to become aware of the lengthening days. Most of the daylight is gained in the afternoon, since the sun now sets more than 30 minutes later than a month ago.

- 30 - If you're up late tonight, take a glance outside at the full moon. The early-winter 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. The Ojibwa called the moon of January the Spirit Moon.

- 31 - Although it's happening too slow for most of us to notice, winter's forces are gradually reshaping the landscape as water freezes in narrow seams of rock, expands and breaks the rock into smaller fragments.

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