



# Winter 2016

By Ann Prince

## JANUARY

**3** From a dark location, after midnight, observe the Quadrantids meteor shower—now at its peak with up to 40 shooting stars per hour.



**5** In graceful contrast with the white snow, golden curled beech leaves still cling to branches. This deciduous tree does not shed its leaves until well into the winter season.

**12** Springtails, also known as snow fleas, look like peppery specks on the white snow-covered ground. On warming days watch for them springing from here to there at the bases of trees and among the leaf litter.



**17** Fragrant green-gray waxy bayberries persist in clusters on scrubby branches. Year-round yellow-rumped warblers, red-bellied woodpeckers, and black-capped chickadees favor the berries and thrive on their high fat content.

**24** Full moon. The Wolf Moon (Native American).



**30** Breeding season for great horned owls begins about this time. Juniper, beech, and pine are all favored trees for nests. Pairs may roost together near their chosen site before the female lays eggs, which hatch in just over a month.



## FEBRUARY

**2** Groundhog Day. If Ms. G, the official state groundhog of Massachusetts, fails to see her shadow, according to nature lore, the wintry weather will soon subside. Should a day of sunshine reveal the groundhog's shadow, the forecast is six more weeks of cold inclement conditions.

**7** Search for Mercury low in the eastern sky during the dark hours just before dawn. The planet is most visible now because it's at its highest point above the horizon.

## FEBRUARY (cont.)

**15** Look for various tracks on snowy fields and in woodlands—prints you may find include those of coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and fishers.

**22** Full moon. The Ice Moon (Celtic).



**26** Among the earliest of spring migrants, killdeer arrive as early as late February in exceptionally warm years. Listen for their *killdee killdee* call in fields and pastures, and on playgrounds, lawns, unpaved driveways, beach dunes, and other open areas.

**28** Maple sap begins running given the proper weather conditions; an alternating sequence of short warming trends and cold spells is best for sap flow.

**29** Leap day. Since it takes the earth 365 days, 5 hours, and 48 minutes to circle round the sun, a Leap Year with one "extra day" every four years is an adjustment that keeps our calendar in synchrony with the planetary cycle.

## MARCH

**1** The furry light gray flowers of pussy willow burst from their buds.

**4** The first of the migrant red-winged blackbirds are returning north. The earliest groups are made up almost entirely of adult males. Look for them perched on high marsh reeds and rushes such as cattails, displaying their bright red and yellow shoulder patches, or epaulets.

**14** Great blue herons return to rookeries; they begin nest building and repair almost immediately upon arrival.

**20** Vernal equinox: first day of spring. Night and day are of equal length.

**23** Full moon. The Fish Moon (Colonial American).



**27** Mourning cloaks, among the longest lived butterflies, overwinter as adults in tree crevices and beneath loose bark, and emerge on warm days in early spring.



**30** Tree swallows return. Look for them scouting for nest boxes or tree cavities as breeding season begins.