

OUTDOOR ALMANAC

FEBRUARY 2020

2

Groundhog Day. This marks the halfway point between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox. According to tradition, if Ms. G, the official state groundhog of Massachusetts, fails to see her shadow, 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.



5

On warmer, sunny days look for basking spiders. A very small percentage of our spider species overwinter as adults and mostly stay in the subnivean (under the snow) space. When the weather is good they can be found out and about looking for prey, which are often Snow Fleas.

8

Look for various tracks on snowy fields and in woodlands. Prints you may find include those of Gray Squirrels, Coyotes, Red Foxes, **Raccoons**, and Fishers. Fisher also frequently leave scent markings on tiny saplings that barely poke through the snow.



9

Full moon. This is commonly known as the Snow Moon, but the Passamaquoddy called it When the Spruce Tips Fall Moon. Red squirrels break off the branch tips, eat the buds, and drop the branch tips on the ground.



12

Striped Skunks are not true hibernators but they spend much of the winter sleeping. They emerge to mate about this time of year, which also makes them liable to be food for their major predator. If you're out in the woods and you smell a skunk overhead, it's most likely a Great Horned Owl.



13

Traditionally our maple sugaring season began in mid-February, given the proper weather conditions—an alternating sequence of short warming trends and cold spells—for sap flow. With climate change our season

generally starts earlier, often with significant flow as early as January. Watch for little icicles at the tips of sugar maple twigs that signal flow has started.

15

Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers drum year round but the frequency picks up as they set up territories. Hairy Woodpeckers drum very fast with long pauses—at least 25 taps/second; 20 seconds between— while **Downy Woodpeckers** drum more slowly with shorter pauses—15 taps/second; a few seconds between.



20

Chickadees have started their territorial singing. Usually described as fee-bee, a more descriptive mnemonic is *my-tree*, which is what they are declaring.



21

Look for coyote and deer beds in the snow. Coyotes usually bed in a hollow under evergreen trees or rocky overhangs where they are well protected. Deer also bed under trees but usually pick a protected area where they can also have good views of their surroundings to watch for predators.

27

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



29

Our calendar year is 365 days but the earth actually takes 365 days and about 6 hours to orbit the sun. Every four years we need to add an extra day to make up the discrepancy (4 years x 6 hours=24 hours). Leap day is added to February because it is the shortest month of the year.