

OUTDOOR ALMANAC

DECEMBER 2020

1 Both Short-tailed and Long-tailed Weasels molt from brown to white in the fall. In winters with little snow cover their white pelage makes them easy to see if they are out and about in the daytime.

3 **Beavers** resurface their lodges with a new layer of vegetation and seal them up with a mud shell in the late fall. They leave an unsealed circle in the center of the roof to allow ventilation and on cold days you can sometimes see the steam of the warmer air rising out of the roof.



6 Now that the leaves are gone, Eastern Gray Squirrel dreys, which look like a large ball of sticks and leaves, are visible high up in large deciduous trees. Squirrels usually build more than one drey in late summer-early fall to use as shelters in the winter.

8 Most Great Blue Herons have migrated but you can still find a few where the water is not completely frozen. Used to be they would all be gone by January as their access to fish froze over but with warmer winters we now see a few of them all year.



10 Watch Red- and **White-breasted Nuthatches** as they husk and store sunflower seeds in bark furrows along the trunks of trees.

11 Throughout the winter, chipmunks, skunks, opossums, and raccoons sleep or stay in their shelters for long periods but come out every few weeks while other mammals – coyotes, foxes, bobcats, fishers, deer, squirrels, rabbits – remain active all winter.

13-14 It's the peak of the **Geminid meteor shower**, with as many as 120 shooting stars visible in the dark sky from midnight to dawn.



16 The winter diet of White-tailed Deer – mostly buds and twigs, some evergreen leaves, acorns – is very dry which means their scat is dry as well. The piles of small, oval pellets they leave behind are easy to identify.

17 **Black bears** may still be out and about until nights are consistently below freezing. If you live in an area with bears, it's best to wait until full winter cold to put out bird feeders.



19 If food supplies are scarce up north, crossbills, Pine Grosbeaks, and redpolls may be around by this time.

20 Mating season for Red Foxes is December-February. Male foxes leave scent markings all year but during courtship their urine develops a distinctive skunky odor that is very noticeable.

21 Winter solstice. It's the shortest day and longest night, and the official start of winter. Even though daylight increases from now until June, our coldest weather is still to come.

21-22 The Ursid meteor shower originates from the Little Dipper (Ursa Minor).

25 Look for shiny, leathery, evergreen **Christmas ferns** in the snowy woods.

28 Winter is a great time to learn bird songs – there are fewer singing birds and most of the songs are easy to differentiate. One classic winter songbird for us is the White-throated Sparrow whose song is an upward whistle followed by repeated notes. The mnemonic is *Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*.



29 **Full Moon.** This is commonly known as the Cold Moon but Eastern Woodland tribes had many variations including Snow Moon, Frost Moon, and Long Nights Moon for the December moon that travels high in the sky.

