

OUTDOOR ALMANAC

1

Traditionally maple sugaring season began in mid-late February, given the proper weather conditions of alternating sequence of short warming trends and cold spells that produces strong sap flow. With climate change our season generally starts earlier. Watch for little icicles at the tips of sugar maple twigs that signal flow has started.

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.

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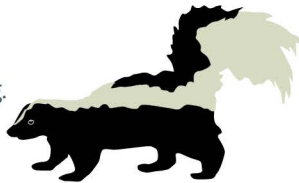
Look for Hooded Mergansers on any open bodies of water. The narrow beaks, striking white and black hoods on the males, and cinnamon mohawks on the females make these beautiful ducks easy to pick out.

8

Numerous gall-making insects lay their eggs in leaves and stems of many different plants. While the insects usually emerge before the end of the growing season, it is possible to find and appreciate the amazing variety of galls in brambles and dead stalks when walking in fields in winter.

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 as prey 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.



15

Hairy and **Downy 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.



16

Turkeys feed in good-sized flocks, but if the snow has thawed and hardened into an icy crust they will have trouble reaching the nuts and seeds underneath. They will turn to evergreen branches or the fertile fronds of sensitive fern that stick up above the snow.

20

Red-winged Blackbirds are returning. The males come back first to display their red epaulets and sing their *konk-a-ree* songs as they establish territories before the females arrive.

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.

23

Male woodchucks are out now defending their territories. The females remain in hibernation for another several weeks.

27

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.



28

Killdeer arrive as early as late February in exceptionally warm years. Listen for their *kill-deer, kill-deer* call in fields and pastures, or on playgrounds, lawns, unpaved driveways, or beach dunes.

