

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 very cold, clear days, see steam rising from a beaver lodge, as inside the lodge is significantly warmer than the outside. Beaver make their lodges weatherproof by covering them with mud—except for the very center, which allows fresh-air circulation inside.

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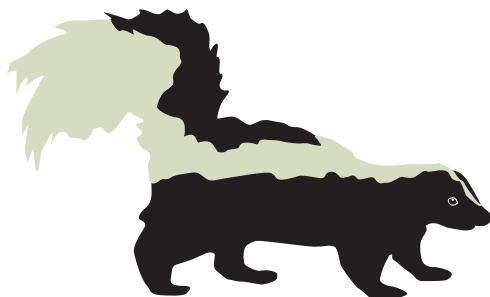
Look for Hooded Mergansers on any open bodies of water. The narrow beaks, striking white-and-black hoods on the males, and cinnamon mohawks on the females make these beautiful ducks easy to pick out.

10

Red Fox vixens scout and clean out several potential dens to choose from once it's time to give birth. Look for piles of freshly excavated soil on top of the snow in gently sloping edge habitats.

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

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.



16

Full Moon



17

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.

20

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.

26

A couple inches of fresh snow make a perfect substrate for animal tracks. Look for **squirrels** (back and front paws are both side by side, making a square shape) and rabbits (the larger, side-by-side back paws in front of the smaller, diagonally placed front paws).



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.