



Winter Wildlife at the Second Marsh

By: Karen Arbour

Winter is in the air, but don't let that stop you from getting out and enjoying nature. Winter may be cold, but things are still happening at Oshawa's Second Marsh and McLaughlin Bay Wildlife Reserve. While some birds and some insects that can't get food in the winter have to migrate to warmer locations to survive, many animals have found ways to adapt to the cold environment of winter.

Some animals hibernate in the winter though many animals are not true hibernators. These species lower their heart rate and metabolic rate but will wake up to feed. Bears, eastern chipmunks, and striped skunks are some of these light hibernators. Two animals that are true hibernators are little brown bats and groundhogs. These animals will reduce their breathing rate, heart rate, body temperature, and metabolic rate, and will not wake up throughout the winter months. They will only awaken in spring when the weather is warmer.

Reptile and amphibian hibernation is called brumation. During the cold winter, the level of sugar rises in the bodies of cold-blooded animals and their internal processes shut down. Wood frogs can freeze and come back in spring again - a remarkable way to deal with winter!

Many animals find other ways to survive the winter. Some animals will grow a thick winter coat and put on extra weight to keep winter cold at bay. Birds grow extra feathers and fluff them up to trap in warm air. Some animals store food to eat during the cold months, while others huddle together to keep warm.

Animals that are awake or partially awake during the winter months will be out and about finding food, while avoiding being food. Signs of this activity are much easier to see in the winter, as all the activity is recorded on the snow that blankets the ground. Animal tracks that can be seen in the snow including mice, squirrels, rabbits, fox, coyote, and deer. These tracks will indicate where the animals go, how fast they have traveled, and even where they stopped to eat bark from a young tree. You can also see where a coyote has had his dinner, and where a bird of prey has caught a mouse and left behind wing prints in the snow when it took off.

Nests that were hidden from view by leaves, bushes, and other plants suddenly become visible during the winter months. Being able to see where animals travel and what they do just shows you how active they are and because of the snow we are able to see it all.

If you are interested in learning more about winter in the wild, keep an eye on our website for upcoming guided hikes at www.secondmarsh.ca.

TAG: Friends of Second Marsh is a registered not-for-profit charitable organization dedicated to encouraging the protection and appreciation of Second Marsh, one of the last, largest and most biodiverse coastal wetlands on the north shore of Lake Ontario. Support the *Love the Marsh!* Campaign at secondmarsh.ca. To reach Friends of Second Marsh, email staff@secondmarsh.ca.