



LAKEHEAD REGION
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

WILDLIFE IN WINTER



CASCADES CONSERVATION AREA



Don't hibernate the winter away. Get out and enjoy the outdoors at one of our Conservation Areas or properties during the winter.

Although there is **no winter trail maintenance the trails are still open** to public use. Be sure to **come prepared** and dressed for the weather and with any gear you may want or need such as water, snacks, map, compass and first aid kit. If you have snowshoes, bring them along.

There are still lots of interesting wildlife and beautiful natural scenery to enjoy. Let's take a look at how wildlife survive through our cold and harsh winters.



Animals have **adapted** to winter in many ways in order to survive.

Some **turn white to camouflage** (blend in) with the snow, like snowshoe hares and ermines (weasels).

Some animals **hibernate** like bears, skunks and chipmunks.

Some animals put on **additional fur or feathers and a layer of body fat** to keep them warm like wolves, deer and owls.

Some animals, like squirrels, mice and beavers, **gather extra food** in the fall and store it to eat later.



It can be difficult for animals to live in places that receive large amounts of snow. Deep snow can be difficult to move around in; animals must spend more time and energy walking through it or finding food beneath it. Deer, elk, moose, and other grazing animals use their hooves and muzzles to **clear snow away** from plants they need to eat to survive.

Small birds such as chickadees **change what they eat** during the winter and eat buds and seeds to take advantage of food that is available.

Animals may find **winter shelter** in holes in trees or logs, under rocks or leaves, or underground. Some mice even build tunnels through the snow. To try to stay warm, animals like squirrels and mice may huddle close together.

Of course some birds are not adapted to our colder winters and so fly south to stay warm. **Migration** means they travel to other places where the weather is warmer and they can find food.



Insects too have to survive the winter and do so by hibernating in what is called **diapause**. Insects will find a dry place, out of the wind to spend the winter. They produce an antifreeze chemical in their bodies to keep them from freezing. Others survive as **pupae**.

Certain spiders and insects may stay active if they live in frost-free areas and can find food to eat. There are a few insects, like the winter stone fly, crane fly, and snow fleas, that are normally **active in winter**.

Some reptiles and amphibians **burrow** into the mud at the bottom of a pond to hibernate until spring. They can get the oxygen they need from the water right through their skin. Others bury themselves under dead leaves on the forest floor, and the snow on top protects them from the freezing air. They may also produce an **antifreeze** chemical so that their bodies don't freeze.

Some fish migrate to warmer waters but many others move into the **deeper, unfrozen water** and become less active.

Fresh, un-compacted snow typically is 90 to 95 percent trapped air. Many animals take advantage of **snow's insulating qualities**, and burrow into the snow to hibernate through the winter.

What about plants? Because water is frozen in the winter deciduous plants handle the lack of water by shedding their leaves, which tend to evaporate water into the air. Evergreen plants keep their foliage, but their leaves and needles have a thick, waxy coatings to reduce water loss.

When we get out and explore our natural areas we will be fortunate to see the signs of how life continues throughout our northern winters.

CHALLENGE:

Go on a Winter Photo Scavenger Hunt or make some snow art

Get creative! A little snow and water, and you've got all you need to let your inner artist shine. Packing snow is easy to work with, so get outside, soak up some sunny Vitamin D and get to work.

There's a whole world of stunning photography waiting for you outside this winter. From trees frozen with crystalline ice to glorious sunsets across a frozen plain, there's a photo opp waiting to happen everywhere you look. Share with us on Facebook @lakeheadregion

A few ideas: The perfect snowflake, a squirrel's nest, an icicle, A silhouette of a bare tree, light refracting on snow or ice, wild animal tracks, a leaf still stuck to a tree, Birds at a birdfeeder, frost on a windowpane.

