

**Kidz' n Nature**

**Outdoor Wonders: Where Do They Go In Winter?**

*By Suzanne Kahn Eder*

Have you ever wondered what happens to the frogs, dragonflies, bears, and other wildlife when the weather turns cold? Where do all of these nature friends go? Some of them take a long winter snooze while others travel great distances to spend the season in warmer climates.

Creatures with long winter slumbers are hibernators. Hibernation requires a warm cozy place to sleep. Groundhogs go underground, while bats seek shelter in caves. Snakes cuddle in burrows and rocky crevices with lots of their relatives. Some types of frogs snuggle under the muck at the bottom of a pond, waiting for spring to arrive. Bears sleep in their dens for most of the winter, but the pregnant females awake to give birth to cubs during the coldest months of the year. There are hibernating insects, too. Adult dragonflies die in the fall, while the younger nymphs survive under the ice in a pond's leafy bottom.

Some creatures leave Maine during the winter and venture to warmer places. This is called migration. Many birds migrate in the fall in search of winter homes that offer plenty of food. Osprey fly south for fish, warblers for insects, and Canadian Geese blanket the fields of southern climates eating grasses and grains. Even monarch butterflies, with their delicate wings, take to the skies when the fall chill arrives. They fly all the way to Mexico! Humpback whales migrate from the Gulf of Maine to the Caribbean Sea. It takes them several months to complete this incredible swimming journey!

Many animals that are able to find enough food remain active during Maine's winter. Deer and moose feast on tree buds and twigs. Coyotes and foxes dine on tasty rodent meals that they pounce on in the snow. Owls do nightly searches for small mammal dinners, then rest in the safety of trees during the day. Beaver ponds are frozen in the winter, but that doesn't stop these clever rodents. They stay protected in their twiggy lodges and eat tree treats that they stored underwater in the fall.

Next time you visit an icy pond, imagine the dragonfly nymphs and frogs under the muck below. Watch for an owl at dusk, flapping in silent flight. Look for animal tracks and other signs of our wildlife neighbors. With spring flowers and showers in our not too distant future, keep your eyes and ears alert for the hibernators and the well traveled migrators. When you see or hear them, send them a warm welcome.

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