



Hidden Pond Nature Center

February Almanac, 2024



Natural events, happenings and fearless predictions based upon 40 years of observations at Hidden Pond Nature Center. Important disclaimer: Your observations may vary! Hidden Pond is not responsible for errors, erratic behavior or other whims of nature.

In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks. -John Muir

First Week

Daffodil buds emerge from the ground. Groundhogs or woodchucks will occasionally emerge from their winter sleep to explore the world. Hear the mournful coo-cooing of the mourning dove, an early sign of spring. The doves are pairing up and may start nesting next month. We are gaining about two minutes of daylight each day, and our average daily high and low temperatures slowly begin to rise. Fox tracks in the snow are easily recognized as they carefully place their hind feet in the tracks left by their front feet, unlike our clumsy dogs. Red-bellied woodpeckers are excavating nesting cavities. These cavities may be used later by other birds like titmice, wrens, and chickadees that also nest in holes in trees.

Second Week

The constellation Orion is high in the southern sky in the evening. His belt points down to the left toward Sirius, the brightest star in the sky and only 8.6 light years away. Sap begins to flow in the red maples. Their red buds are swelling and on days with below freezing temperatures, sap leaking from the buds may form "sapsicles." Smooth alder, a shrub found alongside streams and ponds, is now in bloom with yellow and purple three-inch-long catkins. Eastern grey squirrels bear three to five young this month, the first of two litters each year. The other litter will come mid-summer.

Third Week

Red shouldered hawks are performing their courtship displays, wheeling and screaming high in the air. Their distinctive cry is described as a slurred two syllable *kee-yer, kee-yer*. Our wooded stream valleys are the red shouldered hawk's preferred habitat. Chipmunks now awaken from their deep sleep or torpor. They are omnivorous, feeding on seeds, nuts, berries, bulbs, insects, worms, snakes, other small animals and even birds. Red fox kits may be born this month.

Fourth Week

Full Moon is on February 24. Bright Jupiter sets in the west after midnight. Yews are in bloom and release clouds of pollen when nudged. Wood frogs, *Rana Sylvatica*, find puddles and call for a mate day and night with a faint quacking. The quacking sounds like rubbing two balloons together. Their eggs must develop quickly into tadpoles, then into small froglets, in a race against the time when the puddles dry up in early summer. On warm days, birds will sing, especially the cardinals who seem to say *what cheer-what cheer!* or maybe *wet year, wet year*. They may sing to celebrate surviving the toughest month of the year.

