

Nature in the Neighborhood



It is said that February is the most depressing month of the year. It's the shortest month but can feel like the longest. With the holiday celebrations over and perhaps our New Year's resolutions broken, we're left with cold and dark days; Spring feels so far away. The urge is to stay indoors and hope the groundhog doesn't see his shadow. (As a rather large one frequents my yard, I can always let you know.)

Our advice at the Swampscott Conservancy is to do just the opposite – instead of staying inside, get outside. The landscape may appear dreary and lifeless but there's much to discover in nature this time of year. Take a hike in one of the town's conservation properties – either a short hike in Ewing Woods, or a longer one in Harold King Forest. You'll find animal tracks in the snow, dried wildflowers in the understory, and abandoned bird, squirrel and wasp nests in the overstory. Take a field guide with you, such as *A Guide to Nature in Winter*, by Stokes, and learn what you can discover that makes the season – and you – come alive.

Winter is also great time to go birding. While there may be fewer species than you'll find in the warmer months, the birds are much easier to spy now that the leaves are off the trees -- and there are visiting migrates that you won't see in the summer. Seabirds that spend most of the year as far north as the Arctic vacation in Massachusetts in winter, and this is your chance to see them.

On January 11th, the Conservancy hosted a winter ocean birding event at Red Rock Park. Led by Harry Wales and Colleen Hitchcock, the group spied some migrating waterfowl including, among others, White Winged Scoters, Common Eiders, Loons, and Black Ducks -- as well as a playful seal bobbing in the surf. Curious to know what other seabirds have been spotted in Swampscott? Check out

<https://ebird.org/nh/hotspot/L813701?yr=cur&m=&rank=mrec>

If you are new to birding or just want to perfect your birding skills, we suggest downloading the free Merlin app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The Conservancy plans to have more bird walks and hikes in the new year but there's no need to wait. Take your bird and field guides and binoculars and get outside and discover what's happening in nature in our neighborhood this February. (And if you see a rather large groundhog, please ask her to stay away from my vegetable garden this year.)

Upcoming Events

The Conservancy is planning a number of Spring events include: *"What's that smell? Micro-ecology of Nahant Bay Algae"* presented by Don Pinkerton in March and the *City Nature Challenge Bioblitz* in April. And don't forget the ongoing *"Climate Change and Faith"* Speaker Series that the Conservancy is hosting together with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn: On February 26th come hear Dr. Marcos Luna speak about *"Climate Change as a Social Justice Issues: What it Means for the North Shore,"* and on April 1st, Richard B. Primack, author of *Walden Warming*, will present his lecture on *"The Impact of Climate Change on the Plants and Animals of Thoreau's Concord."* More information on the Conservancy's upcoming events is on our website at swampscottconservancy.org

If you're not on our mailing list, send your name & email to swampscottconservancy@gmail.com and we'll put you on it. Please also renew your membership for 2020 if you're an existing member, or consider becoming a member if you're not. Info on joining is on our website.