

# FEBRUARY

## OUTDOOR ALMANAC



**01** A couple of inches of fresh snow make a perfect substrate for animal tracks. Look for signs of **squirrels** (back and front paws are both side by side, making a square shape) and **rabbits** (the larger, side-by-side back paws in front of the smaller, diagonally placed front paws).

**02** Groundhog Day. This date is halfway between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox. According to tradition, if Ms. G, the official state groundhog of Massachusetts, fails to see her shadow, the wintry weather will soon subside. Should a day of sunshine reveal the groundhog's shadow, the forecast is six more weeks of cold, inclement conditions.

**06** Traditionally maple sugaring season began in mid-late February, given periods of warmer days and cold nights that produce strong sap flow. With climate change, our season has become erratic and can start as early as mid-late January. Watch for little icicles at the tips of sugar maple twigs that signal flow has started.

**09** **Red Fox** vixens scout and clean out several potential dens to choose from before they are ready to give birth. Look for piles of freshly excavated soil on top of the snow in edge habitats along gentle hillsides.

**10** Great Horned Owls lay 1-4 eggs using nests that were built and abandoned by other species such as Great Blue Herons or Red-tailed Hawks.

**12** Full moon

**14** Striped Skunks are not true hibernators, but they spend much of the winter sleeping. They emerge to mate about this time of year, which also makes them liable as prey for their major predator. If you're out in the woods and you smell a skunk overhead, it's most likely a Great Horned Owl.

**18** **Hairy and Downy woodpeckers** drum year-round, but the frequency picks up as they set up territories. Hairy Woodpeckers drum very fast with long pauses—at least 25 taps/second; 20 seconds between—while Downy Woodpeckers drum more slowly with shorter pauses—15 taps/second; a few seconds between.

**17** While cattails' seeds are too small for most birds, some, like Black-capped Chickadees, feed on insect larvae and cocoons that overwinter within the seed heads. Keep an eye out for them on marshes, wetlands, and pond edges.

**20** Look for coyote and deer beds in the snow. Coyotes usually bed in a hollow under evergreen trees or rocky overhangs where they are well protected. Deer also bed under trees but usually pick a protected area where they can also have good views of their surroundings to watch for predators.

**23** **Raccoons** are emerging from their winter dens to mate. Females will give birth to kits about nine weeks later. These animals are synanthropes, or animals that benefit from human-created environments.

**26** Listen for the *peter, peter* song of Tufted Titmice. Titmice have many different calls that can be difficult to identify, but the distinctive repetitive mating song is a herald of the changing seasons.

**28** **Red-winged Blackbirds** are returning. The males come back first to display their red epaulets and sing their *konk-a-ree* songs as they establish territories before the females arrive.

### PHOTOS

Squirrel Tracks  
Red Fox © Karen Walker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Raccoon © Roger Zhu  
Red-winged Blackbird