



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2025

WILDROOTS NATURE PLAY PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

-Elizabeth Mitchell's version



The Winter Solstice Lantern Walk was a magical event, and we are grateful to all those who joined us in the snow to mark the shortest day and the longest night. We couldn't have planned more perfect weather and, for a change, the precipitation came in a form that was favorable!

Now, as we settle into the depths of winter, we can look to the ways in which the natural world slows down and focuses on survival in January and February. We can allow ourselves to turn inward and rest, and focus on maintaining the acts of daily living that ensure our physical and mental health are prioritized. Sometimes that looks like a cozy PJ day on the couch, and sometimes that looks like getting bundled in all of our gear so we can brave the elements and soak in what little sunlight is available. Granting ourselves permission to tune into our own rhythms and needs as part of nature is critical to our own ability to survive right now, and to show up in the roles that are most important to us. We have to tend to our own light in order to use it for good in our families, communities, and beyond. Take care out there, friends.

Things on our Minds

As we reimagine what WildRoots Play can offer our community, we look again towards early spring days, and hope to gather in play and connection soon. Sending health, rest, and peace to all of our families as we navigate winter.



Coyote track



Bobcat track

Nature Highlights

The female *American black bear* gives birth to an average of 2 cubs this month, while denning. She is alert enough to care for the babies, who are less than half a pound at birth. She sleeps when they sleep, and they will remain with her for the next year and a half (black bears produce offspring every two years).



Some deciduous trees continue to photosynthesize despite not having leaves in the winter. They use their bark instead! *Trembling aspens* are an example of one of these trees, with slightly greenish bark due to the chlorophyll it contains.



Although most have disappeared from view, insects are overwintering in many different forms right now. Some enter diapause or dormancy, others migrate or spend the winter as eggs, larvae, pupae, or adults in protected environments (under bark, leaf litter, inside dead plant stems, etc.).



Snow on the ground offers a unique opportunity to track the comings and goings of wildlife. By learning to identify the distinguishing features of tracks and movement patterns of local animals, we have a window into their lives that we wouldn't otherwise be able to see. A good tracking guide and a tape measure can make identification easier.

MASSWILDLIFE
Pocket Guide to Animal Tracks

White-Tailed Deer H: 2 1/2" - 3" F: 2 1/2" - 3"	Moose H: 4 1/2" - 5 1/2" F: 2 1/2" - 3"	Raccoon H: 4" F: 2 1/2"	Striped Skunk H: 1 1/2" F: 1 1/2"
Dog H: 2 1/2" - 4" F: 2 1/2" - 4"	Coyote H: 1 1/2" - 2" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Porcupine H: 3" F: 2 1/2"	Beaver H: 6" F: 3"
Red Fox H: 2" F: 2 1/2"	Gray Fox H: 1 1/2" - 2" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Black Bear H: 7-9" F: 4 1/2"	Opossum H: 2" F: 1 1/4"
Bobcat H: 2" F: 2 1/2"	House Cat H: 1 1/2" - 2" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Woodchuck H: 2 1/2" - 3" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Muskrat H: 1 1/2" - 2" F: 1"
Otter H: 3 1/4" - 4" F: 2 1/2" - 3"	Fisher H: 2 1/2" - 3" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Snowshoe Hare H: 5" F: 1 1/2"	Cottontail Rabbit H: 4" F: 1 1/4"
Mink H: 1 1/2" - 2" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	Weasel H: 1/2" - 1" F: 1/2" - 1"	Gray Squirrel H: 2 1/2" - 3" F: 1 1/2" - 2"	White-Footed Mouse H: 1/2" - 1" F: 1/4"
Tracks Not To Scale Tracks will show considerable variation depending upon conditions of ground (snow, mud, dust, sand, etc.) and movement of animal.		MASSACHUSETTS DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581 p: (508) 389-6300 e: mass.wildlife@mass.gov	

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