

# Nature Niche

## *Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder*

### Winter, 2012

**Volume 9, Issue 4  
Calendar of Events**  
*Please call the hosting  
organization for  
reservation  
information.*

**Trim a Tree for  
Wildlife.** Sat. Dec. 8.  
3:30-5pm. Families are  
invited to make yummy  
treats for birds and  
other wildlife to take  
home or hang at the  
Preserve. Come  
prepared to take a  
short walk to collect  
natural objects, then  
come in and use them  
to make hanging treats.  
BHWP 215.862.2924.  
Fee.

**Toddler Walk.** Dec. 12.  
10-11am Kids ages 18-  
36 months with adult.  
Buttinger Nature  
Center. Pennington, NJ  
(609) 737-7592. Fee.

**Winter Survival.**  
Homeschool 12-14 year  
olds. Wednesday's Jan.  
16-Mar. 6. 1:30-  
3:30pm. Kids will learn  
the strategies plants  
and animals use to  
survive the winter, and  
apply them to learn how  
(continued)

### Northern Visitors

Christmas came early this year to the Newitt household. I have been enjoying the visitors to my bird feeders since mid October, but while my husband and I were having coffee on the screened porch one late fall morning, we were treated to a gift from the north. No not Santa, yet. While watching the goldfinches gorge themselves on the sunflower seeds, a Red-breasted Nuthatch flew in and grabbed a seed, then flew off. We followed his comings and

goings for several minutes. Each time he'd fly in, grab a seed, then fly off to a nearby perch. Quite a treat for the bird and us.

The next day, as we watched several American Goldfinches feeding, we noticed two other birds on the ground that were much larger than the finches. After closer inspection and a retrieval of the binoculars, we realized they were Evening Grosbeaks. Then the grosbeaks

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### Hibernation

I've always felt bad for the groundhog they pull out of the hole to see if he sees his shadow. The poor thing looks like he was jarred from a deep slumber and, well, he was. Hibernation is a complicated thing. I've been trying to get to the heart of it for several years and the amount of bogus and conflicting information out there is staggering. Many of us grew up thinking in the winter, animals went to sleep and didn't wake up until spring and that meant they were hibernating. Now we've come to learn there is a lot more to it than just

closing ones eyes.

Hibernation is a kind of sleep, but not in the sense we think. Hibernation involves several steps which include lowering of the body temperature, often to just above freezing, and slowing the heart and breathing rate. These three biological components are what enable an animal to survive the cold with no food, water or waste elimination. Essentially, the animal's metabolic rate is so slow, the animal is hanging between life and death. Only mammals can be considered true hibernators,

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humans can live outside during the cold months. We will cover shelter building, fire making, finding food, setting traps and snares, as well as other useful skills. Fernbrook Farm Education Center. 609.298.4028.

**Animal Tracks and Traces.** Sat. Feb. 9. 3-4:30 pm. 10-adult. Join me as we search for the signs animals leave behind. Though we rarely see the animals of Bowman's Hill, we can tell who was there by reading the clues left behind. This program can count toward your Twinleaf Award. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. 215.862.2924.

Spend some time outdoors after an overnight snow. If you walk through woodland trails or through a meadow after a night of snow, all the animals that came out at night will have left their tracks in the freshy fallen snow. It is a wonderful activity to do with kids or on your own. One of my favorite things to do after a snow is to follow the tracks to see where the animal went through the night. With little or no vegetation under the trees, it makes it much easier to track them.

**We're on the Web**  
<http://naturebytheyard.com>

## visitors (*continued*)

were joined by about 30 Pine Siskins. Wow, what a show. It was quite a party! It seems last summers drought caused a massive failure for the pine cone production. This failure forced some northern birds to migrate further south. It is a rare treat for us "southerners" since these birds aren't seen here every year; only when conditions merit them to move south. Pine Siskins look very much like the winter plumage goldfinches,

but they have heavy streaking on their breast. Red-breasted nuthatches are small inquisitive birds with black and white stripes on their head and a reddish hue on their, you guessed it, breast. The evening grosbeaks haven't been seen in Bucks County in 10 years, and though it wasn't confirmed by an expert, my husband and I feel confident that's what they were. They have been recorded close by, so it isn't just grandstanding. Keep an eye out!

## hibernation (*continued*)

since other animals like snakes, and insects are cold blooded and can't regulate their body temperature. There are some birds that "hibernate" between meals, but there are subtle differences that may be explained in another article. In the mid-Atlantic, bats that don't migrate and groundhogs are the only two animals that fit the actual definition of hibernators. They don't wake to eat, drink or eliminate waste, their body temperature drops

to near freezing and their heart and breathing slows. Animals such as brown bears and chipmunks enter a torpor, but since they don't alter all three biological components, it isn't considered hibernation. I realize I may have shattered the bucolic image we all have of bears curled up sleeping blissfully through the winter, and for that I apologize. You may just need to swap out the picture of a bear and insert a groundhog instead. Sorry Phill!

## About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We offer fun, hands-on nature education programs for schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves and other organized groups. We also provide

workshops for teachers on using the schoolyard as a classroom tool as well as offer advice and expertise on designing school yard habitats. For details on our services, visit <http://naturebytheyard.com> or call Pam at (609) 610-6292.