

January



January is the coldest month in Falmouth. The ground freezes and feels as hard as rock under your boots; ponds and cranberry bogs are usually frozen, and even salt water bays and estuaries sometimes freeze. At some point this month there is likely enough snow to go cross-country skiing or snow-shoeing. Try the Quashnet*, for a really flat run, or Long Pond* for some hills. If you prefer boots, this is a good time to walk along the bike path, admiring the scenery that goes by so fast if you are on a bike. Wherever you go, here's what to look for in Falmouth in January:

Wintering ducks, driven out of the now-frozen freshwater ponds, spend their time in the salt ponds and embayments. Good places to see them include Falmouth inner harbor, Perch Pond, and West Falmouth Harbor. Look there for Buffleheads, Canvasbacks, Scaup and Goldeneyes as well as Black Ducks, Mallards, and Widgeon.

Along the shores of Vineyard Sound and Buzzards Bay you may find **Loons, Eiders and Brant**, all of which prefer the open waters of the sounds and bays.

River Otters are seen fairly often at this time of year as they travel from frozen marshes to salt ponds and bays to fish.

Snow-covered ground provides a good opportunity to **watch for the tracks** of the creatures that live here but are rarely seen during the daytime: White-tailed Deer, Coyote, Fox, mice and voles, and those River Otters. If you are lucky you might find wing prints where an owl swooped down and caught a mouse.

Listen for **Great Horned Owls** in the dark evenings. Although seldom seen, they are here year-round. Just now they are hooting to each other as they start to nest .

January weather is cold and stormy, often bringing a blizzard or even two, but January also often features a "January thaw" with enough warm weather to melt the snow and even bring some fog.

The dry air continues to make **sky-watching** rewarding; the stars are so clear. Watch for the Pleiades—a group of seven visible stars—high in the east in the evening.



White-breasted Nuthatch. Photo by Craig Gibson

Although **many birds migrate to warmer climes, those that can find food here during the winter often stay**. In addition to the ducks, they include Great Blue Herons and Kingfishers, that fish in open water, Song Sparrows that glean seeds in meadows and also visit bird feeders, Cardinals and Robins that eat the fruits of Holly and Bittersweet, and the Chickadees, Woodpeckers, and Nuthatches that pick spiders, eggs, and insects from the crevices of tree bark.

* trail maps at: www.300committee.org/maps.htm

Preserving Open Space for Falmouth

157 Locust Street • Falmouth, MA • 02543-2658 • Phone 508-540-0876 • www.300committee.org