

December

December begins to feel like winter: the days are short and the wind is cold, but bundle up and go out—there is still a lot to see. Look for wintering ducks along Surf Drive*, or stroll around the Punch Bowl in Beebe Woods* to see the woods in quiet repose. Here's what to look for in Falmouth in December:



The **glacial erratics and kettle holes** are best seen at this time of year, when the leaves are down and the “bones” of the land show through. Take a walk on the moraine: Beebe Woods*, Long Pond*, the Moraine Trail*, the western part of Crane Wildlife Area*, or the Mock/Moraine Trails*, to see these features for yourself.

Flocks of **Cedar Waxwings** and **Robins** gobble the fruits remaining on Hawthorns, Crabapples, Red Cedars, and other fruiting trees.

Ponds that have been greenish brown with algae grow clear as the cold weather kills the algae. Many ponds begin to freeze; by the end of the month most fresh-water ponds are completely frozen over. Their inhabitants are either hibernating, like the Snapping Turtles down in the mud, or have gone south, like the Night Herons and Red-winged Blackbirds.

Most plants are brown or have been killed back by frost, but some provide **spots of green color year round**. In addition to the White Pine and the Pitch Pine, a number of native plants are evergreen: Sheep Laurel, Wintergreen, Trailing Arbutus, American Holly, and the club mosses.

Bonaparte's Gulls and **Great Cormorants** arrive from the north.

The **shortest day of the year** is around the 21st: only 9 hours and 5 minutes between sun-up and sun-down.

The dry winter air makes the **stars** especially bright, and the long hours of darkness make for good sky-watching, if you bundle up. Orion is easy to see as it rises in the east in the evening.

The **weather becomes stormier**, with the threat of snow, and winds that are more often blustery from the northeast than gentle from the warmer south.



Male American Wigeon. Photo by Craig Gibson

The **Christmas Bird Count** occurs on the Upper Cape in mid-December. If you see a flock of bird-watchers following the flocks of birds, it is probably a group of counters.

Wintering ducks are a big feature of the salt ponds and along the shore: Look for flocks of **Goldeneye**, **Scaup**, **Hooded Mergansers**, and **Buffleheads** in any coastal pond or embayment from Falmouth inner harbor to Waquoit. Perch Pond is especially good.

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

Preserving Open Space for Falmouth

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