

Wintertime Wildlife by Mark Campen, Education & Wildlife Specialist

When the leaves have fallen and cooler temperatures settle in around the region, looking for wild animals and signs of their presence can be an enjoyable and enlightening activity. Although many birds have migrated south and the reptiles and amphibians have gone underground, there are still good opportunities to observe wildlife. Telltale signs such as animal tracks, scat (droppings), feathers and fur can be seen well against a blanket of snow or along the exposed sand and silt mud banks of the Tennessee River. Look into the leafless hardwood trees and you may see the silhouette of an owl or a hawk. Wildlife activity abounds in many habitats, from residential areas and city parks to rural country sides and farmlands.

There are many year-round resident and migrant birds active in Tennessee during the colder months. Waterfowl such as the mallard duck, American coot and Canada goose may be found easily while the more elusive wood duck, bufflehead and common loon can be hard to find. Winter brings ring-billed, herring and Bonaparte's gulls through Tennessee. Along most waterways, the belted kingfisher can still be seen perched on a tree limb, wire or rock above its favorite fishing hole. In field, scrub-shrub and woodland habitats you can find many birds actively feeding on seeds and looking under bark and leaves for insects and their eggs. These include the golden and ruby-crowned kinglets, dark-eyed juncos, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows, hermit thrushes and the red and white-breasted nuthatches. Providing bird seed and suet may attract more common species such as the northern cardinal, eastern bluebird, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, eastern towhee and seven different species of woodpeckers.

Seen more often during the warmest times of the day and season, mammals that don't hibernate may be flushed from cover or can be found foraging for food near a den sight. Examples include the white-tailed deer, red and gray foxes, coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, gray and red squirrels, skunks, otters, minks, eastern cottontail rabbits and the deer mouse, who will inhabit old bird nests or build their own atop tall field grasses.

So, when you are walking through the snow, riding a bike or just enjoying the view from a window in the comforts of your own home this winter, keep your eyes peeled and your ears tuned to the sights and sounds of wildlife in the wintertime.

FLLA members, please feel free to call or email Mark with any questions that you may have about wildlife in your area. Guided wildlife tours for youth, church and neighborhood groups, as well as attracting and deterring wildlife, habitat assessment and management suggestions are available. 865-523-3800 or Mark@FLLake.org.



American Coots on a log floating down the Tennessee River



"Vantage point, sitting atop a silt fence, this barred owl was seen at Turkey Creek wetland last winter just before catching a field mouse"