

February

Lengthening daylight and higher sun in February begin to loosen winter's cold hold. When the ground is snow-free, a walk around Long Pond* or to the Punch Bowl in Beebe Woods* will let you see the first signs of the changing season. In northern New England winter is succeeded by mud season. Here on the Cape the ground is so sandy that it thaws quickly and meltwater drains away, sparing us most of the mud. Here's what to look for in Falmouth in February:



Ponds begin to thaw, and most are ice-free by the end of the month, providing more space for the Scaup, Buffleheads, Mergansers and other ducks who come south to spend the winter in our temperate climate.

Wintering **Red-breasted Mergansers** often hunt in packs of eight or more, diving underwater together to pursue the fish that are their primary food.

Skunks often waken from hibernation about now and venture out on mild evenings to search for food. They may dig holes in lawns and garden to find grubs and earthworms or buried seeds and nuts.

Gray Squirrels have been active all winter; they do not hibernate. They become more active now, chasing about as they court and establish breeding territories.

Cardinals, Carolina Wrens, and Chickadees that have spent the winter here get an early start on staking out their nesting territories. The males begin to sing on warmer mornings about now.

Snow often falls in February, even late in the month, however once the storm is past the snow usually does not last long under the influence of the bright sun..

Male **Red-winged Blackbirds** return and jockey to claim the best nesting territories. They are the earliest migratory birds to return; sometimes you hear their "konk-er-eee" song from a snow-covered marsh or thicket. The females will follow in a few weeks, and the pairs soon start building their nests.



*Male Red-winged Blackbird. Photo by Craig Gibson
Calendar by Beth Schwarzman*

Sap begins rising in trees during thaws and can sometimes be seen dripping from broken limbs or twigs. Squirrels occasionally take advantage of drips of the sweet sap from maple trees.

The **buds of Red Maple and Blueberries** turn brighter red and begin to swell as the weather warms and daylight lasts longer. **Willow** and **Alder** buds also swell starting about now; their color is golden yellow.

*trail maps at www.300committee.org

Preserving Open Space for Falmouth

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