

December - Week 1

Aquatic Mammals in Winter

Winter's grip begins to take hold in early December as the average high temperatures are at or below 32 degrees and overnight lows are in the teens. Many aquatic animals are busy preparing for life below ice while others prepare to live a winter existence both above and below the ice.

Many turtle and frog species dig and bury themselves in the mud and sand and enter a deep sleep in the bottoms of lakes and ponds. Other animals such as otters, muskrats, and beavers prepare to be active all winter. Muskrats have stored up food in cattail lodges and beavers have created caches of tree branches in the water near their lodges that they will feed on throughout winter. River otters on the other hand will remain active keeping some holes open in the ice along shorelines to move back and forth from water to the land.

This week visit a shoreline of a local lake, pond, wetland, or river. Observe clues of aquatic animal life and also any signs of their preparation for winter. Check for tracks in snow, sand, or mud. If there is ice on the water's surface, are there access holes for otters or beaver to move from the water to land and back again? Are there signs that beavers have harvested food for the winter? Do you see beaver or muskrat lodges? Or beaver or muskrat tracks or trails? Otter tracks, including otter slides in snow or mud? Document your findings in words, pictures, and numbers.



River Otters remain active all winter.