



## December - Week 3 *Winter Solstice: The Longest Night*

**The official beginning of winter is marked** by the winter solstice this week. The winter solstice typically falls on or around December 21st. It is the “shortest” day of the year, meaning it has the shortest time period between sunrise and sunset, about 8 hours and 46 minutes. Conversely, it has the longest night with sunset occurring around 4:30pm. (An even earlier sunset occurs in northeastern Minnesota.)

How are daytime temperatures and the activity of birds and mammals impacted by the short days at this time of year? Where do they go at night? And what do they do in the long periods of darkness (there are about 15 hours and 15 minutes between sunset and sunrise)? Consider how you respond to the long winter nights. Do you go to bed earlier or the same time as you do in other seasons? How do you pass the time in the evening? Compare this to the opposite, the summer solstice around June 21st when daylight lasts about 15 ½ hours.

Go outside at night and observe. You don't have to stay up late to do it. After all, it is probably pretty dark in the 5 o'clock hour. It may take 10-15 minutes for your eyes to acclimate to the dark. Listen and look. Once your eyes adjust to the darkness, what do you see? Are there constellations you can see or is it cloudy? What do you think the animals are doing at night? Where do you think they are spending the night? How do they stay warm? Outside by the glow of a flashlight or in the warmth of your home, document your observations as you write about Winter's First Night, the Longest Night.

