

October - Week 4 *Animals Preparing for Winter, Already?*

By the fourth week of October the length of daylight has decreased by one hour and forty five minutes since the Autumnal Equinox, which was just about one month ago. Along with the longer nights come colder nighttime and daytime temperatures. These environmental changes trigger changes in hormones and behaviors in many living organisms. Amphibians like the American Toad dig down more than a foot to sleep through the winter below the frost line in the soil. Short-tailed weasels and snowshoe hares fur begins turning from brown to white in preparation to better camouflage in the impending winter landscape. Other animals like the 13-lined ground squirrel and black bear search out den sites to begin hibernating.

This week, think like an animal preparing for winter. Search on the ground and look in and around trees for possible den sites. Where would be a good place to sleep through the winter? Create a labeled drawing of a possible den site for a bear, a toad, or another hibernating animal. Identify what makes the spot suitable for a “long winters’ nap”.

Alternatively, search out a ‘winter wonderland’ for a snowshoe hare or short-tailed weasel. Describe the amenities that make the habitat suitable for the hare or weasel to live in comfort this coming winter. Add a sketch of the habitat and of the animal.



During winter months Gray Squirrels frequently switch from living in nests made of leaves and sticks to holes in trees.