

Nature in the Neighborhood – December 2021

There's a Cold Moon Rising

The last full moon of the year will rise on Saturday, December 18. One of its traditional names, as noted in the Old Farmer's Almanac, is the "Cold Moon" – no reason to wonder why it's called that. December has traditionally been a cold month. (Although, as I sit here writing this article, the temperature is predicted to be in the 60's today -- the seasons are changing in more ways than one because of climate change.) December's full moon has also been called the "Long Night's Moon." Again, no surprises as the shortest day of the year occurs in December.

Yes, December is usually a dark and cold month. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be getting outdoors and enjoying nature in our neighborhood – whether it be on one of the Northshore's nature trails or your own back yard. Nearby places for hiking include Harold King Forest (off Nichols St.), the Forest River Connector (behind the cemetery and near the dog park), Jackson Woods (above the High School) and Ewing Woods (near the Stanley School). The Conservancy will be coordinating hikes this winter so be sure to check our website at swampscottconservancy.org for upcoming events, or get on our email mailing list. Audubon and the Trustees also organize outdoor winter activities – including Full Moon hikes at several of their properties.

Though it seems counterintuitive, winter is actually a great time to go birding. Without the foliage on the trees, birds are easier to spot. Some winter favorites you may see are chickadees, dark eyed juncos, tufted titmice, nuthatches, red-tailed hawks, and cardinals, to name a few – and, if you're lucky, in Nahant you may just spy a snowy owl. The winter also brings migrating seabirds which spend most of the year as far north as the Arctic, but then vacation in Massachusetts in the winter. The migration brings, among others, bufflehead ducks, white winged scoters, common eiders, black ducks, brants, and loons. So grab your binoculars and head out to the forest or shore. To help you identify what you see, bring along a field guide or use the free Merlin app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

And don't forget to bring your camera. Snap some winter scenes of nature in our neighborhood and submit one to the Conservancy at swampscottconservancy@gmail.com. It may be chosen as the photo of the month and run in The Swampscott Reporter and the Conservancy's website and Facebook pages.

The Swampscott Conservancy also encourages you to share the fauna and flora you see by contributing your photos to our iNaturalist project. What's iNaturalist? It's one of the world's most popular nature apps and it helps you identify the plants and animals around you. It's a great way to get kids (not to mention adults) interested and enjoying nature. To get started, create a free account at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) or via the smartphone app. Then, upload your photos. If you don't know what it is you're looking at, iNaturalist will give you suggestions on what it thinks is in your photo. Wonder what people have been observing in Swampscott? Go to the Swampscott Biodiversity Project page at: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/swampscott-biodiversity>

We hope you'll plan to get out to observe and enjoy nature this winter -- and, if the skies are clear, don't forget to look up and take in the magic of one of the season's full moons.

A Word from the Conservancy

As 2021 comes to a close, I'd like to thank everyone who has supported the Conservancy by becoming a member. Despite the pandemic, it been a busy year for us and, with the community's and town's help, we've accomplished a lot this past year, including:

- Partnering with the Girl Scouts to open the new more accessible "Ridge Trail" at Harold King Forest;
- Ongoing trail maintenance, clean-up, and marking at Harold King Forest, the Forest River Conservation Area, and other town conservation lands;
- Leading hikes in Harold King Forest, Salem's Forest River Conservation Area, Lynn Woods, Breakheart Reservation, and Salem Woods;

- Organizing a walk exploring the history of open space in Swampscott and Salem with David Townsend (author of *“Retracing Steps”*);
- Educational talks by: Doug Tallamy, author of (*“Bringing Home Nature”*), Richard Primack (author of *“Walden Warming”*); David Meshoulam (from Speak for the Trees Boston) on tree equity; and Melanie Garate (from Mystic River Watershed) on Climate Justice issues in the Mystic River Watershed;
- Holding our annual Native Plant Sale at the Swampscott Farmers Market;
- Sponsoring the building of bat houses by Swampscott Middle School students;
- Participating in the Reach Arts Garden Walks to showcase the Conservancy’s pollinator garden at Town Hall;
- Designing and assisting in the planting of a woodland garden at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Swampscott;
- Pollinator plantings at the Swampscott cemetery entrance; and
- Organizing clean-ups at Muskrat Pond, Ewing Woods, and Forest River Connector.

The Conservancy is also the proud recipient of a 2021 grant from the Massachusetts “Plant Something Beautiful” program!

We’re planning exciting new community building activities this coming year that will include further educational, habitat improvement, and trail exploration programs. Please continue your support of our efforts by renewing your membership for 2022, or, if you’re not a member, of joining. This can be done on our website: www.SwampscottConservancy.org on the Ways to Donate page.

Wishing everyone in the neighborhood a happy and healthy New Year.